

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

ANGUS MACVIÇAR has also written

RETURN TO THE LOST PLANET

THE LOST PLANET

TIGER MOUNTAIN

THE GREY PILOT

STUBBY SEES IT THROUGH

KING ABBIE'S ADVENTURE

FARAWAY İSLAND

THE BLACK•WHERRY

THE CROÇODILE MEN

IN PREPARATION

THE SECRET OF THE LOST PLANET

ANGUS MACVICAR

Dinny Smith Comes Home



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To
JACK SMITH
(Another of the Clan!)

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1 <i>JOURNEY TO TOWN</i>	9
2 <i>NIGHT ADVENTURE</i>	19
3 <i>THE BAKER'S SHOP</i>	32
4 <i>TWO HALF-CROWNS</i>	42
5 <i>ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN</i>	54
6 <i>FRIEND IN NEED</i>	64
7 <i>CAUGHT BY THE POLICE</i>	73
8 <i>JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND</i>	79
9 <i>"PIT-PROPS LTD"</i>	91
10 <i>A VISIT TO HOSPITAL</i>	98
11 <i>SANDY DONALDSON</i>	109
12 <i>THE CHILDREN'S OUTING</i>	120
13 <i>A BAR OF CHOCOLATE</i>	126
14 <i>THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS</i>	134
15. <i>FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH</i>	144
16 <i>BACK TO DRUMBEG</i>	157

JOURNEY TO TOWN

BENEATH THE southern slopes of "The Blacksmith"—so called in Gaelic because of a curious rock-formation at its summit which resembles a powerful man striking an anvil with a hammer—there lies a narrow glen; and at the mouth of this glen, where a burn leaps out from among the heather and emerges into the cultivated strath as a calm, slow-moving river, stands a square of whitewashed farm-buildings. That summer afternoon smoke from a chimney rose vertically into the placid sky.

Near the front door of the house the black cellulose paint of a modern car twinkled in the sun. Three people—two women and a man—were grouped beside it, looking across the yard towards the byre door. There, in a curiously strained attitude, a small boy was kneeling on the cobbles.

He looked neat and tidy in his blue jersey and grey flannel shorts. His face was clean, his rough sandy hair carefully brushed. But the grown-ups knew only too well that he was hard put to it to keep from crying as he spoke softly to the wriggling brown puppy in his arms:

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Good-bye, Cruach. I've got to go now. Good-bye..."

The yard was so quiet that half a dozen fat white hens clucking and scrabbling in the shadow of a hayshed seemed to be making a considerable noise. The warm air was filled with a scent mingled of peat-smoke and freshly cut meadow hay.

In the depths of his mind young Dinny was aware of his peaceful background. He hated leaving it. He hated leaving the kindly folk with whom he had lived for the past six weeks and who personified its security. But most of all, at this particular moment, he hated leaving Cruach, who had been his constant companion ever since that incredible first night at the farm when he had found her curled up like a ball of fluff at the foot of his bed. Parting was sheer agony and almost more than he could bear.

He put the puppy down at last and got to his feet. It was time to turn and face "Aunt" Mary and "Uncle" Peter and climb into Dr Mathieson's car. But he couldn't turn round just yet. If he did they would see the tears in his eyes and call him a "softie". Aunt Mary had taught him that swearing was a bad thing, and on the whole he was inclined to agree with her; but as Cruach crouched there at his feet, whimpering, he said "Damn" three times under his breath, quickly and desperately.

Mary McKerral saw the tragic droop of his shoulders. "Peter," she said quietly to her nephew, "let him have her—please!"

JOURNEY TO TOWN

There was a worried line on the young farmer's tanned forehead. "I told you," he answered, "a town's no place for a dog—nor is that awful house."

"But she's all he's got. He'd be kind to her."

"I know. But would the others?" He ran his fingers through his fair hair in a gesture that was partly exasperated, partly irresolute. "A pedigree collie," he went on, "cooped up in a Glasgow tenement, starved and—and whipped, perhaps . . ." He broke off, trying to ignore the grief evident in every line of the boy's back. "There's no sense in it!" he exclaimed.

Jean Mathieson, most unlike a conventional doctor in her trim blue suit and dainty shoes, put a hand on his forearm. "Peter," she said, "Mary's right. They seem to need each other. And where love is concerned, is there—is there ever sense in anything?"

There was an odd timbre in her voice. He looked down at her quickly. But almost at once she turned her dark head away, and before he could think of an answer his aunt had taken his silence for consent and was running across the yard.

She knelt beside Dinny. "Take her, dear," she said. "She's yours—for keeps."

Slowly he straightened his back, and the unhappiness in his eyes changed to joyous astonishment. "You mean—I can take Cruach with me?"

"Yes." She smoothed back a wisp of her iron-grey hair. "Uncle Peter wants you to look after her."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

For a moment he leaned against her stout and comfortable figure, fighting hard to control a new and unexpected emotion. Then suddenly he bent down and lifted the puppy.

"Gosh!" he whispered, as Gruach licked his face with enthusiasm. "Thank you, Aunt Mary . . ."

At the age of ten it's difficult to express what one feels; and as Dinny got into the front seat of the car beside Dr Jean Mathieson and said good-bye to his hosts, his words were few and his freckled face gave no hint of the gratitude and affection surging inside him. But for some time after they left the farm Jean knew better than to talk to him.

They crossed the old stone bridge and sped down past Peter's young corn, past the church and the small, straggling village into the valley. It was a countryside she knew well, for she had been born in the parish manse and often came back to spend short week-ends with the McKerrals. She still looked on Peter as a big brother and was inclined to be annoyed when he compared—as he often did nowadays—his own rough-and-ready farmer's life with her job in the city as a child welfare specialist.

As they turned into the main road and joined a thin stream of traffic heading for Loch Lomondside and Glasgow, she glanced across and saw that her small passenger had become more relaxed.

"Like an orange?" she said.

JOURNEY TO TOWN

"Yes, please." He spoke quietly, as if anxious not to disturb the puppy sleeping in his lap.

"Well, put Cruach in the back. Don't worry, she won't wake up."

He did as he was told and smiled with relief when the advice proved true. Then he took the orange and began to peel it, facing his task with boyish concentration.

Jean marvelled again at the change in him. Ten weeks before, when she had first seen him as an emergency pneumonia patient in the Children's Hospital, his cheeks had been pinched and dirty, his bruised arms thin to the point of emaciation. Now he looked sturdy, clean and well-fed, more like a normal boy; and though he still remained small for his age, his eyes no longer held that haunted look of terror.

Her experiment had been a success. This little boy, whose father was a suspected criminal—this child of the slums called Dinny Smith—had proved once again that environment was the villain of the piece. Country air and ordinary human kindness had put roses in his cheeks and revealed a courageously honest character.

But would the improvement last, now that Dinny was going back to his father and step-mother?

When she had asked the McKerrals as a special favour if they would look after a child from Glasgow during his convalescence she had hoped that Mary

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

and Peter would grow fond of him and eventually ask to keep him for good. This part of her plan had worked perfectly, but to her indignation Red Jake had refused point-blank to consider such an arrangement. At the end of the six weeks he had demanded his son back, and no argument or appeal would make him change his mind.

The car came out of the leafy bends of the Loch Lomondside road and entered the town of Alexandria. Dinny cringed back in his seat. The presence of Cruach and his enjoyment of the orange had up till now kept him from thinking about the house in the Cowcaddens. But as he saw the busy streets and heard the roar of buses and cars it came to him suddenly that he would soon be back with his parents. He shivered, remembering the bruises that had once disfigured his arms.

As she drove along the Boulevard and into Great Western Road, Jean did her best to keep his mind occupied. She spoke of the Clyde and the big ships they could see passing up and down, of her own work as a doctor and about the strange, backward children she had to deal with. But all the time Dinny grew quieter and quieter, and when they swung into the narrow canyon of Silver Street she saw that his face was pale and tense. Not once, however, did he mention that he was afraid.

Stopping the car half-way along the street she

JOURNEY TO TOWN

collected his new suit-case—a present from the McKerrals—while he gently wakened Cruach and took her in his arms. Children playing “pee-veer” on the pavement stared at them curiously as they got out and entered the dark close, which, even on this summer day, smelt of damp.

Jean knocked at a door on the first landing. Voices came from inside, followed by a quick scuffling. Then the door was opened by a woman wearing a tight yellow jumper and blue skirt. In her stained fingers she held a cigarette.

At first her eyes were wary, but when she recognised her visitors, she smiled.

“It’s Dinny!” she exclaimed. “Welcome home, Dinny!” She stooped to peck at his forehead, and he suffered the caress with stoic immobility. “And what’s this you’ve got? My, a lovely wee dog! Isn’t that nice!” She patted Cruach’s head, then turned to Jean. “Come away in, Dr Mathieson. My husband’s in the kitchen. We’re both awful grateful for what you’ve done.”

Collarless, his stout ill-shaven face shining with beads of sweat, Red Jake was working at a table littered with steel shavings. As they came in he swept a newspaper over one corner, but Jean had already glimpsed a number of small objects which looked like home-made keys. He got up quickly, rolling down his shirt-sleeves.

“Well, I never!” he said, in a high-pitched voice.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"If it isn't Dr Mathieson. And Dinny—quite the little gentleman. Dressed to kill, eh?"

He was smiling broadly, and a dusty shaft of sunlight from the window glinted on his cropped grey hair. But the smile did not reach his eyes, and Jean felt uneasy and uncomfortable as she always did in his presence.

"Isn't Dinny looking well?" she said.

He put his head on one side. "So he is, the rascal! But—who gave you the pup, son?"

"Uncle Peter," replied Dinny, in a small tight voice. "Her name's Cruach—and she's mine."

"Oh, she's yours?" He mimicked the boy's changed accent. "Been learning how to talk, too, I see!"

"Cruach's pedigreed and pretty valuable," Jean put in. "I hope she'll be well looked after."

"Don't worry about that. She'll be looked after all right." His eyes narrowed. "Nellie," he said, with sudden sharpness, "get Dr Mathieson a cup of tea."

Exhaling smoke, the woman scuffled across to the gas-ring but stopped with a shrug as her visitor said quickly: "No, thank you. I must get back to hospital at once."

Jean paused, gathering herself for an effort. Outside the kitchen window the confused traffic noises were suddenly obliterated by the whistle of a train entering a nearby station. When it died away she continued: "I just wanted to ask you, Mr Smith—

JOURNEY TO TOWN

won't you reconsider your decision? Mr McKerral is offering your son a good home on the farm, and Dinny himself would be happy there, I know."

Red Jake smiled again, spreading his thick, powerful hands. "Maybe you're right," he said, softly. "But me and Nellie would break our hearts if we lost him."

"It's for Dinny's sake——"

He waved her to silence. "Dinny needs us, and we need Dinny." He took a step in her direction, his eyes pale and bright. "And I *am* his father. You can't deny it."

She shivered. "I don't deny it," she said.

"That's fine." He became genial again. "Me and Nellie think the world of you, Dr Mathieson. No one could have done as much for our boy as you and the McKerrals. But—well, there's no place like home, is there?"

His step-mother put an arm around Dinny, making him cough with the smoke from her cigarette. "Now that he's well," she said, huskily, "he'll like it here. It's what he's been used to. He'd be lonely up there in the Highlands."

Anger stabbed in Jean's mind like a scalpel. She stood poised and straight, and in that crowded, untidy kitchen her trim freshness seemed exaggerated and out of place.

"Very well," she said abruptly, but the lift of her chin acknowledged only temporary defeat. Then she turned to the boy, camouflaging her feelings with a

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

warm smile. "So long, Dinny. I'll come back and see you soon. Be good and—and take care of yourself."

Nellie and Red Jake accompanied her to the door. But their son remained in the kitchen, holding Cruach tightly against his chest.

NIGHT ADVENTURE

ON THE following morning, unwillingly, Dinny went to school and renewed acquaintance with the boys of Silver Street. But something had gone wrong. He was no longer at ease with them; and during the morning break he realised to his dismay that they were resentful of his good clothes and soft accent. He tried to join in their games and was pushed aside.

As he was going home in the afternoon a big boy of twelve, racing for a bus, knocked into him and fell. He got up, shouting crude threats. More boys gathered round.

Two months ago Dinny would have given back threat for threat; but Mary McKerral's gentle influence had changed all that. "I'm sorry," he said, quietly.

The big boy scented weakness. Encouraged by eager toadies, he went into action. "Sorry! I'll mak' ye sorry! Wee cissie—that's what ye are!"

Confused and miserable, but with blind courage, Dinny tried to defend himself. He hit out and pushed his attacker away, but the other boys came crowding in. A schoolbag smashed against his face and his head jerked back, striking an iron railing.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Stop it! Stop it!" he cried, involuntarily.

But there is no mercy in a crowd, and a fresh onslaught was beginning when someone yelled: "Look out! The polis!"

There was a sudden silence, during which Dinny breathed in thankfully great gulps of air. Then, like a bunch of jackals, his opponents scattered and took to their heels.

In a moment, impelled by his own instinctive fear of the law, he also turned and ran.

But when he got back to his bedroom Cruach was waiting, grinning and wagging her tail. The rough caress of her tongue and the wriggling sincerity of her affection made up for a lot.

As the days went past he found it possible to ignore both the enmity of his school-mates and the callous indifference of his parents and be happy enough in her company. Each night he fed her with scraps begged from an amiable grocer. Then he'd fall asleep, comfortably conscious of her warm body in the crook of his arm.

One day, however, about a week after his return to Silver Street, he came in from school and heard no welcoming whimper. In sudden panic he searched underneath the bed and behind the rickety chest-of-drawers. But the puppy wasn't there.

He ran to the kitchen. Red Jake was crouched over the table, filing a piece of metal gripped in a vice. His step-mother appeared to be out.



NIGHT ADVENTURE

"Where's Cruach?" said Dinny, finding it hard to conceal his anxiety.

The man looked up. Smiling, he put down the file and mopped his face with a handkerchief. "Cruach?" he answered. "Oh—you mean the dog?"

"Yes. Where is she?"

Red Jake patted the small stiff shoulders. "Now, Dinny, I know fine you'll understand. Me and your mother—we're poor folk, and it's difficult to make ends meet in these hard times." He sounded friendly, but a cold hard light glinted in his eyes. "Another thing—it's no kindness to keep a pedigree pup in a place like this, and we thought—well, to tell you the truth, son, your mother sold her this afternoon to old Isaac Rabin. You know him—he keeps the dairy round the corner."

Dinny felt as if he might suffocate. "But she's mine!" he cried out, involuntarily. "She's mine! You'd no right to do it!"

"She was worth ten pounds—and ten pounds is not to be sneezed at."

The man's voice was quiet, but even in his distress Dinny recognised the menace behind it. He stood trembling, not knowing what to do or say. The magnitude of his loss, coupled with fear of his father, crushed him into silence.

After a time Red Jake smiled again. "If you'd do something for me," he said, with slow emphasis, "you could have her back."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

For a moment Dinny failed to grasp his meaning. Then, quite suddenly, it came to him that a miracle was happening. He looked up at the moist, stubbly face, and his eyes promised anything—anything at all—in return for Cruach.

“Think of the fun we used to have!” Red Jake leaned against the table, dabbling his fingers in the steel shavings. “When you helped me with a job we’d be well off, and your mother would buy you lollipops and ice-cream. Remember?”

Dinny remembered. In a confused way he realised what was coming; but his one desire, shining like a lantern in a dark tunnel, was to see Cruach again.

His father went on: “I’ve been planning a job for tonight. If you give me a hand with it—and if it comes off—I’ll buy your puppy back from old Rabin.”

One afternoon, as they worked together at the hay, Uncle Peter had explained to him the difference between right and wrong. Now, standing before his father, he heard as if from a distance the terrifying thunder of God’s commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.”

“Well, is it a bargain?” Red Jake’s eyes were slowly widening.

Dinny hesitated, but his love for Cruach was stronger even than a commandment of God, and at last he made up his mind.

“All right,” he said, with a catch in his breath. “I—I’ll give you a hand.”

NIGHT ADVENTURE

There was no moon that night. Dinny and his father left the house soon after eleven o'clock and made their way towards a small factory well hidden from the glare of the street lamps and nestling under tall dark chimneys which shadowed it like a forest.

Beside a strong wooden door at the rear of the main building Red Jake stopped to survey the position, firmly holding his son's arm. In the night-watchman's room in the central yard a brilliant light was burning. This illumined the whole office frontage, and if anyone wanted to get at the safe inside it would have to be by this door at the back.

Presently a distant clock-tower chimed midnight. Peering round the corner, Red Jake saw the night-watchman crossing the yard to his room after his regular hourly tour of the premises.

"Now's our chance!" he said to Dinny. "You know what to do. The ventilator up there is open. It's too small for me, but you'll manage. I'll lift you up and push you through. Then you unlock the door on the inside and let me in.

Dinny was trembling. "I—I don't want to do it!" he whispered.

The man clutched his arm still tighter. "You'll do it, you little runt! You'll do it, or I'll tan your hide off!"

Dinny tried to pull himself away, but his father held and shook him. "Snap out of it!" he threatened. "Come on!"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Roughly he caught the boy beneath the armpits and hoisted him to the level of the ventilator. In a daze of misery Dinny caught the open steel frame and wriggled under the sash.

"Now—drop down inside!" ordered Red Jake in a harsh undertone. "Go on! I'll kill you if you don't!"

Dinny twisted round until his legs dangled in the dark office. He was afraid to jump but more afraid of Red Jake. After a moment he clenched his teeth and let go, landing with a thud on the concrete floor. At once, half-sobbing, he started to fumble for the key. Finding it at last, he gripped it with both hands and turned the lock. Then he opened the door and allowed his father to shuffle in.

As he stepped back his foot struck a fire-bucket behind the door, overturning it with a loud crash.

"You fool!" snarled Red Jake. "By heaven, I'll break every bone in your body!"

But as Dinny regained his balance there were running footsteps on the asphalt outside, and a light dazzled his eyes. Cursing, his father made a grab for him. He ducked below the swinging arm, however, and made instinctively for the door. By now he was so confused that he didn't realise what he was doing. All he wanted was to get away—away from this frightening place.

The rear of the building had now been lit by an overhead lamp, and as Dinny raced outside he had a glimpse of the burly, shirt-sleeved night-watchman

NIGHT ADVENTURE

running towards the office. With a quick swerve he avoided him and fled for the gate in the back wall by which he and his father had come in.

Thwarted and angry, Red Jake stood his ground for only a few seconds. But in that time he heard a shrill whistle near the front entrance and the night-watchman shouting to an unseen ally: "A wee boy, constable! He's just passed me!"

Then he knew he must act. He took a cosh from his pocket and stood flat against the wall behind the office door. As the night-watchman came panting in he struck—and struck hard. The man slumped forward with a gurgle in his throat.

Red Jake wasted no more time but ran for a shadowed section of the wall which surrounded the factory. Just as two policemen came hurrying into the yard he clambered over and got clear away.

Half-an-hour later he was back in Silver Street. His wife met him in the tiny, gas-lit hall. She saw the cold fury in his eyes and shrank back.

"Jake, what's happened?"

"Where's that boy?" he demanded. "He's going to pay for his clumsiness!"

"Dinny, you mean?"

"Yes, Dinny!"

"He—he hasn't come back yet."

"What!"

"He hasn't come back."

The information seemed suddenly to sober him. He

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

pushed her into the kitchen and stood by the table, rubbing the back of his hand against his chin.

"That's bad!" he muttered.

She came and caught the lapels of his jacket. "Jake," she said, desperately, "did something go wrong?"

~~"You bet it went wrong! The little idiot bungled~~

~~the whole job. The watchman heard us and saw~~
Dinny make a getaway. I knocked the old fool cold before he recognised me, but the damage was done."

"You mean——"

"Before I coshed him he yelled out that a small boy had just passed. Don't you see! They'll be looking for that small boy now, and if they get hold of Dinny he'll spill the beans and I'll be nabbed for sure."

The full implications of the disaster dawned on Nellie. She let go his lapels and fumbled on the mantelpiece for a cigarette. She lit it shakily and leaned against the cold stove.

"Maybe—maybe he'll come back," she said.

"Maybe he will." His voice was harsh. "But we can't bank on it. I'm going to look for him now! If he turns up when I'm away, don't let him out of your sight. I'll deal with him—later."

He turned and left her.

Meanwhile, shivering with cold, Dinny crouched in a dark lane which led to Silver Street. He was scared that the police would find him—but still more scared, after what had happened, to return and face his father.

He was tired and thirsty. He had cut his lip against

NIGHT ADVENTURE

the frame of the ventilator, and a salty taste persisted in his mouth. But worse than that, there was sick despair in his heart. After all his hopes—after all he had done to keep his part of the bargain—there seemed to be no chance now of getting Cruach back. What could he do? To whom could he turn for help?

Intermittent traffic still went past on Silver Street,

bered with a pang his quiet room at the farm.

• If only—at this moment—he could run to Aunt Mary and hide his face against her motherly shoulder as he had so often done when he had fallen and hurt himself. If only he could fall asleep and wake in the morning to hear the hens clucking in the yard below, the cows lowing as they came in to be milked, and Uncle Peter's friendly voice: "Rise and shine, young fellow! Ham and eggs for breakfast!"

Pressing closer to the hard brick wall, he clung for comfort to his memories.

He remembered the quiet evening when, for the first time, he heard a lark singing.

He remembered the black-faced lamb that had been lost and how he and Uncle Peter had gone tramping through the rain-soaked heather to find it. Leaning over a cliff-edge, he himself had lifted it to safety with the miniature crook specially made for him by the Drumbeeg ploughman. And when they got home, wet and tired, Uncle Peter had put a hand on his shoulder and had said to Aunt Mary: "We'll make a

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

farmer of him yet!" And he had felt proud and happy and important—a real man in spite of his age.

He remembered the week-ends when Dr Jean Mathieson had come to stay and everybody was in high spirits.

On a Saturday night, before he went to bed, they'd often play "Catch the Ten", and to his surprise he'd almost always win. It made him happy to win, but it puzzled him why he was able sometimes to capture Uncle Peter's "Ten" so easily.

On a Sunday afternoon, after church, while Aunt Mary took a short nap, he would go scrambling up the glen with Dr Mathieson and Uncle Peter. And the grown-ups would laugh and talk together and go hand-in-hand as if they were children, too; and Dr Mathieson would tease poor Uncle Peter until his face was red. But he wouldn't be unhappy or angry about it—and on the way back they'd join him in a game of "Cowboys and Indians". That was super! . . .

At the end of the lane, Silver Street now appeared to be empty, like a street in a ghostly city of the dead.

The lane itself was dark and utterly silent. Absorbed in the past and remembering his success in dodging the "Indians", Dinny had a sudden flash of inspiration. What was there to prevent him returning to the farm?

He stood upright, cold and discomfort forgotten, trembling at the very thought of such a wonderful solution to his plight. But then, like blows from a

NIGHT ADVENTURE

heavy fist, two difficulties occurred to him. First, he would be leaving Cruach behind with Isaac Rabin; and second, though he knew that Uncle Peter's farm was called Drumbeg, he had no idea where it was exactly, or how to reach it from Glasgow.

But his longing for Drumbeg and for the warm friendliness of Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter was so strong that almost at once he found the answer. If he went to Isaac Rabin's dairy now—in the quiet dark hours of the early morning—Cruach might hear his whistle and come to him. He remembered also that the road to the farm went by Loch Lomondside and that the tall dark mountain behind Drumbeg was called "The Blacksmith". Once clear of Glasgow, he was sure that any grown-up he asked would guide him to it. Everybody knew "The Blacksmith".

The idea that he might soon be with Cruach made him overlook the danger and loneliness of such a scheme. He felt hopeful again, and the need for action was suddenly like a fever.

Keeping to the maze of narrow lanes behind Silver Street, he made his way quickly towards Isaac Rabin's back yard. His sandshoes made no sound on the cobbles, and his burning resolve kept him from being afraid of the dark corners and side-alleys. He met no one, and the only sound he heard was the crying of a baby in a high tenement.

At last he reached the open yard, which was enclosed simply by a wooden paling. In the dim light

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

which filtered through from Silver Street he could see two milk-carts inside and beyond them a low stable, with closed doors.

He whistled softly. At first there was no sound, except the restless movement of a horse in its stall. But when he tried a second time there was an answering whimper.

His heart pounded. Peering in through the paling, he saw a small object excitedly moving about under one of the milk-carts. He knew at once that it was Cruach, tied to the cart with a piece of string.

I must get her, he thought. I'll work hard for Uncle Peter and pay Isaac Rabin back. If I left her behind she'd never forgive me. . . . Then he was wriggling through the paling and stooping down to release her.

Cruach squirmed in his arms with delight, panting and licking his face. Dinny's heart was singing. It was all right now. In Cruach's company he could face anything.

But as he prepared to climb back through the paling he heard a heavy step in the lane outside and saw the prowling light of a policeman's torch. Fear and desperation returned to him. He lay flat on the ground, whispering to the puppy: "Keep still, Cruach! Keep still . . ."

The footsteps slogged nearer, and Dinny scarcely breathed. Suddenly they stopped outside the paling. ~~breathed. Suddenly they stopped outside the paling.~~

NIGHT ADVENTURE

Cruach seemed to understand the tense anxiety of the small hand on his body and remained motionless.

But the policeman saw nothing suspicious. After a moment he moved on. Half-sobbing with relief, Dinny stroked Cruach's head and listened to the solid footsteps receding along the lane.

THE BAKER'S SHOP

D His one idea was to put Silver Street and the Cowcaddens as far behind him as possible.

Like most children of his age in Glasgow, he had a fair knowledge of the city's geography. Keeping to the back streets he made his way towards Great Western Road, reaching it eventually at a point near St George's Cross. He knew it would lead him in the direction of Alexandria and Loch Lomond.

But he didn't dare show himself on its broad, empty pavements. Under the flaring lamps—alone with Cruach—he would soon be spotted by a policeman.

He wondered what he should do. His first hopeful enthusiasm was wearing off, and he felt tired and sleepy.

On his left a covered alley with a locked iron gate at its inner end led to a builder's yard. After a moment's hesitation he went in and sat down, with his back against the wall. The puppy lay beside him, her head resting on outstretched forepaws.

The dark was comforting. He pulled Cruach closer and started to tell her about Jack and the Beanstalk. It was an exciting story—one of Aunt Mary's best.

THE BAKER'S SHOP

But though Cruach seemed attentive and appreciative, he found it becoming more and more difficult to remember the details. After a time he began to nod.

When the far-off University clock chimed two he didn't hear it.

His position was cramped, and though his sleep lasted for five hours it was restless and uneasy. At one stage he dreamt that his father, dressed in a policeman's uniform, was pursuing him along a brightly lit tunnel, at the end of which he could see Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter. But he made no headway towards them, and he wakened with a start to find it was broad daylight, with the sound of traffic on the streets.

He got up, jerking the string tied to the puppy's collar. "Come on, Cruach. Plenty of people about now. It'll be safer."

His neck was stiff. Worst of all he badly needed something to eat and drink. But the fresh morning sunshine acted like a tonic, and he didn't feel too much afraid when he ventured into Great Western Road. Quiet and well-behaved, Cruach trotted beside him.

The street was busy. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry, and to his relief no one paid him any attention.

Down near Park Road a baker's shop was already open. A small van drew up outside, and the driver began to carry in wooden trays piled with bread and rolls. Dinny stopped to watch, feeling hungrier than ever.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

The shopkeeper came to lend a hand—an elderly man with a stout red face. On his second trip he spotted Dinny.

“Hullo, son. Out early this morning? Giving the dog a walk, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Looks a nice collie.” Grinning cheerfully, he re-entered the shop with another tray.

A minute later he was back. To his surprise the small boy was still there, looking up at him with an odd appeal. For the first time he noticed Dinny’s untidy red hair and rather crumpled jersey and shorts.

“Like a roll?” he asked. This morning, for a certain reason, he was feeling warmly benevolent.

“Yes,” replied Dinny, quickly. “And—and please, have you any milk for Cruach?”

The baker chuckled. Taking the last tray from the van and balancing it against his ample stomach, he turned to the driver. “Hear that, Walter? There’s your modern education for you!”

Walter eased his long, thin body into the driving-seat. “Modern parents more like,” he returned gloomily as he drove away.

But the stout man remained good-humoured. “Come along in,” he said to Dinny. “I’m having a cup of tea myself before the rush starts. Bring the pup.”

Two girl assistants in the front shop relieved him of his load, and he led the way into a small room at the back, where a kettle was boiling on a gas-ring.

THE BAKER'S SHOP

Whistling to himself he made a pot of tea and spread three rolls with butter and marmalade. Then he put some milk into a plate, along with a few pieces of stale bread and placed it on the floor for Cruach.

"Now then, sit in to the table, son. Eat as much as you like. Here's a nice cup of tea."

Dinny set to, swinging his legs beneath his chair. After a time he glanced shyly at his host. "The rolls are awful good," he said.

The baker smoked a cigarette with his tea. "Carry on," he replied, hospitably. "Plenty more where these came from." He paused, then added: "We haven't introduced ourselves, have we? The sign above the shop says 'Dewar & Ferguson', but that doesn't mean a thing. I'm plain Joe Smith."

Chewing steadily, Dinny looked up with interest. "My name's Smith, too."

"What! Another of the clan?"

"Yes—Dinny Smith."

"Well, I never! It just shows you. Where d'you come from, Dinny?"

"Silver Street."

"Silver Street? That's a bit away, surely?"

There was no reply, but Joe Smith didn't seem to worry. He had something more interesting on his mind. Leaning forward he went on confidentially: "I expect you're thinking I'm in pretty good form this morning. Well, so I am. D'you know what happened last night?"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

One of the white-coated assistants opened the door, threw a newspaper on the table and said: "Your *Gazette*, Mr Smith." But neither of them paid much heed.

"What happened?" said Dinny, forgetting to chew for a moment. His mouth was round with curiosity.

"My daughter, Mary." Joe Smith's red face beamed with pride. "Married a year ago. Last night her husband phoned from Edinburgh. They've had a son—and I'm a grandfather for the first time!"

Dinny experienced a sense of anti-climax. He had expected something far more exciting and could think of nothing to say. Taking a gulp of tea and looking down to make sure that Cruach was dealing properly with the bread and milk, he began to eat his third roll.

"And guess what they're calling him—my grandson, I mean?" The double chins wobbled. "Joe—plain Joe. After me!"

He patted his chest with satisfaction. Dinny tried to look interested, but the feelings of a grandfather were unknown to him and his success was limited.

The baker went on to describe glowing plans for his grandson. But before he had fully warmed to his subject two things happened almost simultaneously.

Just as he finished his third roll Dinny's eye caught a Stop Press headline in the newspaper on the table: "COSH CRIME IN COWCADDENS".

Suddenly he felt sick and cold and frightened. And in that moment the door opened. He looked round,

THE BAKER'S SHOP

quick and desperate, and saw a policeman standing there.

To his shocked imagination the uniformed figure was gigantic, towering in the doorway like an avenging fate. Craggy cheeks and spiky moustache seemed the outward marks of evil.

Dinny sat motionless, his heart beating like a trapped bird's. He was sure that the police must know of his part in the attempted burglary. If they caught him now he would be severely punished—beaten perhaps as his father would beat him.

Fear made his mind work quickly. At one end of the small room a passage led to unseen back premises. It was his only chance, for the policeman blocked his way of escape through the front shop.

Before either Joe Smith or his visitor could say a word he jumped from his chair. Next moment, with Cruach at his heels, he was racing along the passage.

The two men heard a door being pulled open, then the fading patter of footsteps as Dinny rushed out into a narrow lane. An excited bark from Cruach was the last thing they heard.

Joe Smith got up, eyebrows lifted in astonishment. "I never saw the like! Slap in the middle of his tea! You must have scared him, Alec."

"Yes, indeed. It looks like it." The policeman spoke in the quiet, unhurried accent of South Uist. "Who was he, anyway?"

"He told me his name was Smith. A nice wee chap.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

He was standing outside with his dog, looking hungry, so I asked him in."

"It was funny, him running away like that." Alec scratched the close-cut grey hair behind his cap. Then he shrugged the matter aside. "But och, there's no accounting for boys. Not nowadays. I just came in about the bowling match. The Govan lads want to begin at seven sharp. Will you manage?"

The baker nodded. "You bet I'll manage. Govan needs to be put in its place. Count me in."

"Fine, Joe. That's just grand." He was about to leave when he noticed the Stop Press headline in the newspaper. "'Cosh Crime in Cowcaddens'," he muttered. "My goodness, what next! I'll likely be hearing plenty of this when I go on duty."

The same headline had been noted by Red Jake. Returning to the house in Silver Street about eight o'clock, he sat down to a breakfast of tea and cold sausage. He was tired and nervous. Sweat oozed from his unshaven cheeks.

"Not a sign of him," he grunted to his wife. "But according to this the police haven't caught up with him either." He flung the *Gazette* across the table. "By heaven, if they do find him and he squeals I'll swing for him!"

Dinny's step-mother lit a cigarette and glanced at the paper. Her hands were unsteady. "It says here the night-watchman will recover. That's a blessing. And they don't seem to suspect anyone in particular."

THE BAKER'S SHOP

"I'd be as safe as houses if it wasn't for that kid!" Red Jake bit savagely into a crust of bread. "Where the blazes can he have gone?"

She got up and crossed to the mantelpiece, the heels of her red slippers scuffing the linoleum. Without powder or lipstick her face was lined and grey.

"I've been thinking, Jake. He'll be frightened to come home, after how you threatened him. Perhaps he'll make for Drumbeg."

"What?"

"Perhaps he'll try to go back to the McKerrals. They were kind to him."

"But he doesn't know the way!"

"Dinny's desperate," she reminded him, drawing heavily on her cigarette. "And if you're desperate you'll try anything."

He eyed her sharply. Then a look of cunning replaced the scowl on his face.

"Maybe you're right, Nellie." He swallowed the last of the sausage and noisily drained his cup. Finally he said, "I think I'll take a bus out to Anniesland Cross and watch for him. If he's trying to reach Loch Lomondside he's almost bound to pass there sooner or later."

"What if he's taken a bus himself and beaten you to it?"

"He wouldn't do that. He had no money."

"That's true," she admitted, then added quietly:

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Yes, I can see your best plan is to watch for him at Anniesland Cross."

He rose from the table, wiping his mouth. "Make me some sandwiches and a flask of tea. I'll have a shave before I go."

But as he took off his jacket an authoritative knock sounded on the door outside. They looked at each other in alarm.

"See who it is," he ordered, roughly.

She straightened her narrow shoulders. With cigarette smoke trailing slackly from her mouth she went into the hall.

It took all her resolution to keep from crying out when, as she had feared, the opening door revealed a policeman.

"Mrs Smith?" he inquired, politely.

He was young, with a silky moustache, and she gained some courage from the mildness of his manner. "That's right," she answered.

"I believe you sold a collie pup to Mr Isaac Rabin yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes. Anything wrong with that?"

"Nothing at all. But Mr Rabin has reported that the pup disappeared from his yard during the night, and we just wondered if perhaps it broke loose and found its way back here."

The object of the policeman's visit was now apparent, and inwardly she sighed with relief. Outwardly she looked anxious and concerned.

THE BAKER'S SHOP

"I'm sorry," she said, "we haven't seen a sign of it. But if it does turn up we'll let you know at once."

"Thank you, Mrs. Smith." He touched his cap and went away.

When she reported the conversation to Red Jake he looked surprised. Then an idea occurred to him.

"The dog was the only reason Dinny helped me at all last night. I said I'd let him have her back if the job came off. Now I see what's happened. He took her from Isaac Rabin's yard for company on his way to Drumbeg. The darned little twister! You were right about him, Nellie. But he won't get past Anniesland Cross if I can help it!"

TWO KALR-CROWNS

DINNY WAS only vaguely aware that Anniesland Cross signposted his route to Loch Lomondside and the distant mountain known as "The Blacksmith" which sheltered Drumbeg.

After his startling encounter in Joe Smith's shop he hid for a time in an alleyway. Then he went warily, keeping a sharp lookout for more policemen as he crossed the Kelvin Bridge and continued along Great Western Road.

By now it was nearly nine o'clock. For many of the Glasgow schools this was the last working day before the summer holidays, and the pavements were full of children hurrying to their classes. Among them—even with Cruach trotting beside him—Dinny was inconspicuous.

Desperately he wished he could get away from the city, with its threats of danger on every side. Buses and trams passed him, speeding out towards Anniesland Cross, but he hadn't a penny to buy a ticket. He remembered another of Aunt Mary's stories—the story of the Wizard of Oz. If only he could be a wizard and mount a magic carpet which would transport him at once to Drumbeg.

TWO HALF-CROWNS

He trudged on, picturing to himself the white-washed farmhouse, quiet and peaceful in the green glen below the mountain; and his longing to be there brought a lump to his throat. At this moment, in the bustling, noisy streets, **Drumbog** and all it stood for seemed incredibly far away.

But his determination to reach it didn't waver. Its happiness and security, as compared with his existence in Silver Street, drew him on like a mirage, even though as time went on the vision seemed to become more and more difficult to attain.

He blinked his eyes and summoned up a picture of what they would be doing on the farm at this hour.

"It's ten to nine, Cruach. Uncle Peter will have got all the cows milked and he'll be finishing his breakfast. Maybe they'll be putting in the hay today. I wish we were there. Don't you?"

Cruach jumped up, whimpering, and licked his hand.

Dinny went on: "Today's Friday. Aunt Mary always made butter on a Friday, and I used to get a drink of buttermilk. And Friday was bath-night—remember? When I was all clean Uncle Peter used to carry me upstairs in my pyjamas and we'd have a pillow-fight and Aunt Mary would give us an awful row."

For a time both boy and puppy were silent. Suddenly Dinny said: "I wonder how long it'll take us to

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

reach Drumbeg? If we just go on walking will we get there tonight?"

But Cruach was unable to provide an answer. And perhaps it was just as well that Dinny himself didn't realise that Drumbeg was seventy-five miles from Glasgow and that even under the most favourable circumstances it would take a small boy far longer than a day to walk such a distance. •

A cool breeze had sprung up, scattering dust about his bare legs. But even though he wore sandals the pavements still felt hot. A thought came to him. How lovely it would be if Dr Jean Mathieson came along now and whisked him and Cruach to Drumbeg in her car. What a fuss Uncle Peter would make of them all when they arrived!

Not far away the University clock struck half-past nine. As the chimes faded he noticed an old lady dressed in black approaching them along the street. Moving stiffly and supporting herself with a stick, she carried a letter in her left hand.

As she drew level a sudden flurry of wind snatched the letter from her, and it went whirling and dancing across the pavement.

Her cry of dismay attracted Dinny's attention, and he saw at once what had happened. "After it, Cruach!" he ordered, letting go the string leash.

Cruach bounded with delight at having something to do. Making a tremendous game of it, she overtook the letter as it flicked against the outer wall of a

TWO HALF-CROWNS

butcher's shop, fussed round it for a time as if expecting it to fight, then snatched it up and brought it back to her small master, holding her head high.

He patted her and took the letter. Shyly he offered it to the old lady, who had been watching with bright, alert eyes.

"Well done!" she said, leaning forward and smiling. "That was clever of you and your dog. Thank you both ever so much."

Dinny prepared to move on, but with the crook of her stick she caught his arm. "Don't go yet!" she exclaimed. "Come and post this letter with me. Then we'll have a cup of coffee. Would you like that?"

He recognised the warm friendship in her voice. Joe Smith had been interested only in his grandson, but this old lady was interested in him—and in Cruach, too. She was like Aunt Mary and Dr Mathieson. Her company made him feel important and happy.

But he had no intention of going into another shop, where he might be trapped again. The memory of the policeman who had appeared so suddenly in the baker's back room remained a vivid warning.

"Please," he explained, "I'm in a hurry. I'm not hungry."

Her long black skirt, rucked blouse and fruit-studded hat might follow a bygone style, and the gnarled, ringed fingers clasping her stick might look

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

like talons, but her expression was kind and understanding. "I see," she said. "Then I musn't detain you. But as a special favour may I know your name?"

He smiled up at her with confidence. "Dinny," he said.

"How nice! How unusual, too! But tell me"—she lowered her voice like a conspirator—"why aren't you at school?"

"I'm going away," he told her.

Such a reply might have let loose a spate of embarrassing questions, but she merely nodded and said: "You're lucky. I wish I could go away, too. Unfortunately I suffer from chronic rheumatism and my devoted family seldom lets me out of their sight. They make my health an excuse, but in fact it's because they're afraid I'll spend too much!"

There was a wicked twinkle in her eye which made Dinny chuckle, and in response to her frankness he brought his own secret into the open.

"I'm going to a farm called Drumbeg. Do you know where it is?"

"I'm afraid not."

"It's near 'The Blacksmith'."

"You mean the mountain in Argyll?"

"Yes."

"In that case I do know where it is. You may not think it to look at me now, but when I was a young girl I climbed right to the top of 'The Blacksmith'!"

TWO HALF-CROWNS

Passers-by glanced curiously at the trio standing on the edge of the pavement—the bent old woman, the dishevelled boy and the patient dog. But Dinny and his new acquaintance, absorbed in each other's company, were unaware of it.

"Are you going by bus?" she asked.

Dinny was suddenly confused. He shifted his feet and looked away. But almost at once she came to his rescue.

"Of course you wouldn't go by bus! Much more of an adventure to hitch-hike. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"Yes." Dinny smiled again.

"With your dog for company it should be most enjoyable—specially if this good weather lasts." All at once she broke off. Glancing behind him, her eyes had become sharper than ever. "Don't look now," she whispered. "But the enemy is approaching!"

He started, tightly clutching Cruach's lead. Was it his father? Or a policeman? His mind filled with terror.

"Don't worry," she reassured him. "Not your enemy. Mine. My paid companion, Miss Inglis."

As Dinny recovered from his fright there was a rush of clicking heels. He had a quick impression of a gay flowered frock, then of a breathless young lady with blonde hair and spectacles.

"Oh, Lady Breckenridge, where have you been? The doctor called and you were nowhere to be found. We were so worried!"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"So they sent you out to look for me. As if I were an escaped prisoner!" The old lady's altered voice, crackling along the street, came as something of a shock to Dinny.

Miss Inglis, however, was obviously used to it. "Dear Lady Breckenridge—how absurd!" Her voice was wheedling, like the voice of a mother with a fractious child. "You know how dangerous it is for you to be out alone. Anything could happen. A car might run into you. A thief might snatch your bag——"

"Or someone might come along and rudely interrupt a most interesting conversation!"

Lady Breckenridge glared, and for the first time Miss Inglis seemed taken aback. She glanced at Dinny and the pup.

"I—I'm sorry. I didn't realise——"

"I came out to post a letter," said the old lady, pursuing her advantage, "and I shall not return until I have done so. It is a private letter, and I don't wish my daughter-in-law or anyone else to know about it!"

She sounded so fierce that Dinny was terrified in case some awful row might develop. But Miss Inglis capitulated almost tearfully.

"Very well. But you must understand that all I'm concerned about is your welfare. I shall wait for you at the corner of the street."

Lady Breckenridge sniffed; but as the younger

TWO HALF-CROWNS

woman moved away her expression changed. Looking down at Dinny, she winked.

"That gave her something to think about!" Then she smiled. "Poor Miss Inglis—I'll make it up to her. But I can't stand being treated like an irresponsible child!"

It seemed that the encounter had pleased and refreshed her.

"Now, Dinny," she went on, fishing in a purse at her waist, "I musn't keep you any longer. See and have a nice holiday at the farm and give my love to 'The Blacksmith'. Here's a little present in return for what you and your dog did for me. If I were your age I'd spend it all on ice-cream!"

With a warm smile she stumped off along the pavement, leaving Dinny staring in astonishment at the two half-crowns in his hand.

When he recovered, he realised that he could now afford some form of transport. But as he and Cruach resumed their walk, past Byres Road and the Botanic Gardens, he wondered which transport to use.

The names printed in front of the buses were all unfamiliar, and he was afraid that if he boarded one at random it might carry him in the wrong direction. For a time none of the trams which passed had recognisable signs either.

Then, as he paused for a moment at a red-painted stop, he saw a tram coming towards him with "ANNIESLAND CROSS" prominently displayed.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Right, Cruach, this is what we want!" he exclaimed. "Remember we passed Anniesland Cross when Dr Mathieson drove us into Glasgow. See and behave now, when we get inside."

The conductress helped him to climb the stairs. "Keep an eye on that dog of yours," she warned him, as he took a seat on the upper deck beside the exit. "Some folks object to animals."

She smiled as Cruach jumped on his knee. "That's fine," she went on. "I can see you've got him well trained."

"It's not a him—it's a her," he told her, quickly.

She laughed. "All right, Zoo-man! Now, where d'you want to go?"

"Anniesland Cross," he said, offering her one of the half-crowns.

The car clanged and swayed along Great Western Road. Dinny sat quietly in his corner, trying to appear as inconspicuous as possible. The passengers gave no sign that they were interested in him, but he never knew when danger might threaten.

Though his meeting with Lady Breckenridge had given him more confidence, his nerves were still on edge, and he was prepared at any moment to face a crisis. What kept him going was his desire to reach the haven of Drumbeg. Burning inside him like a constant flame, it supplied him with unexpected determination and courage.

His plans for the journey were as vague as ever,

TWO HALF-CROWNS

but he hoped he'd find someone at Anniesland Cross who would tell him exactly how to get to Alexandria and Loch Lomondside.

The tram passed under the railway bridge and began to slow down for the terminus.

The conductress called up to him. "Right, son. Anniesland Cross."

He went gingerly downstairs and stood on the rear platform. Beyond the tramlines and the tall buildings which hemmed them in he caught a sudden glimpse of open country—distant trees and cattle grazing in green fields. New hope came to him. Drumbeg was out there somewhere, perhaps not so far away.

The tram stopped with a jerk. Dinny jumped down, still carrying Cruach.

As he began to cross the street something made him look to the right. There, running towards him along the pavement, he saw his father.

Dinny came to a sudden halt. Oncoming traffic swerved to avoid him. Horns hooted angrily. But he was aware of nothing except the menacing approach of the burly man in the striped jersey, stained brown jacket and tweed cap.

If his father got hold of him now it would mean good-bye to his dreams of happiness in Drumbeg. It would mean physical pain—and the loss of Cruach.

He darted forward again. A taxi-driver jammed on his brakes and shouted. A bowler-hatted business man put his car into a skid and scraped paint from

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

the side of a bus. But conscious only of the need for flight Dinny ran straight for the opposite pavement, and by a miracle reached it without harm. Pausing on the kerb, he looked back. His father was coming after him, dodging the traffic in short, angry rushes.

With Cruach whimpering in his arms he began to run towards the end of the street, where the buildings opened out to show sunlit hills in the distance. He had only gone a few steps, however, when a policeman came round the corner.

He doubled back.

In the roar of traffic he heard his father's voice: "Stop there! Stop there, you little fool!" He paid no attention.

He caught sight of the entrance to a railway station on his left and rushed inside. The stair up to the main platform was long and steep. His legs were trembling with fatigue and his heart was beating like an engine before he reached the top.

The platform was empty. It wasn't a busy station at any time, and at this hour of the morning trains were few. But in a siding across the main line stood two passenger-coaches coupled together.

Panting with exertion and fear, he jumped down and stumbled across the gleaming rails. He climbed up on the high step of the nearest coach and to his relief found that one of the doors opened easily. Once inside, he knelt on the floor and peered out through the open window.

TWO HALF-CROWNS

"Quiet!" he whispered to Cruach between his knees.
"Quiet, quiet!"

He saw his father come running up on to the platform, glancing about him with an expression which was both angry and bewildered.

Red Jake scarcely glanced at the two coaches in the siding. He went to the stationmaster's office and knocked. And after a few words with the man in uniform who opened the door, he looked round the station again in frowning annoyance, then hurried back down the stairs.

ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN

FOR SOME time after Red Jake had left the station, Dinny crouched in the empty coach, not daring to move.

He could hardly believe the danger was over. It had come with such sudden violence that its passing made him feel limp and tired and unwilling to leave the cool security of the coach.

In any case, the stationmaster was now moving about the platform, examining the labels on three separate piles of luggage and parcels. Obviously he expected a train.

Kneeling by the window of the compartment, Dinny heard a distant whistle. Soon afterwards he saw the train approaching across the Anniesland Bridge, rumbling and hissing like an angry monster—a goods train consisting of about a dozen wagons.

It came pounding into the station, and as the engine passed him Dinny involuntarily ducked. Cruach uttered a small bark of uneasiness, but it was lost in the general noise.

The train stopped. There was talk and some shouting between the driver and the stationmaster, while

ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN

Dinny stared out at a wagon full of red bricks immediately opposite his window.

Then to his surprise he heard the engine moving on, though the rest of the train didn't budge. Presently it came back, and before he quite understood what was happening it had picked up the coach in which he was hiding and was shunting it and its companion on to the goods train.*

He lay flat on the floor, so that he would be invisible from the platform. Cruach snuggled against his side.

The coaches clanged and shuddered as they were automatically coupled to the goods wagons. There was more cheerful shouting, followed by a short blast on the engine's whistle. Finally the whole train began to move forward.

Dinny got up on his knees again. The end of the platform slid past his window, and he noticed that the rails were curving sharply to the right.

For a few seconds this fact scarcely registered on his anxious mind. Suddenly, however, he realised that the train was travelling back towards the centre of Glasgow. Back to Buchanan Street Station, perhaps. Back to the Cowcaddens and Silver Street . . .

Fresh panic surged inside him.

He stood upright and looked out. They were running slowly on top of a high embankment. Would it be safe to jump?

Back in the centre of Glasgow he would meet policemen again—policemen who would shout and

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

ask questions and finally hand him over to his father. There would be dust and noise and unfriendly people. Safe or not, he must certainly jump. It was the only way.

He fumbled with the catch of the door and opened it. The train was now gathering speed, and the grey ash of the embankment below had become a blur.

He lifted the puppy in one hand. Easing himself out on to the step, he gripped the jamb of the door with the other.

The embankment got steeper. It led down to a fence of sharp iron spikes, beyond which lay a new housing scheme in the course of construction.

He stood irresolute. He whispered: "Don't be afraid, Cruach. It'll hurt a little, maybe. But we'll have to risk it."

The step of the coach was desperately high above the ground. On the slope of the embankment pieces of broken glass winked in the sun.

He tried to make himself believe he wasn't frightened. But fear was growing inside him every second.

Perhaps he shouldn't jump. Perhaps the train would soon stop and he and Cruach could get away without being seen. Then he looked up. In the haze ahead he saw the factories and the tenements coming nearer.

Closing his eyes tightly, he let go and jumped. One foot jarred on the edge of a sleeper. As the train rattled past above him, he lurched outwards and fell sprawling on the brink of the embankment.

ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN

He tried to find a hand-hold, but his fingers slithered among the grey ash. He found himself falling. Cruach slipped from his arms and fell yelping beside him.

Half-way down the embankment a sharp pain stung his knee. A few seconds later, he reached the bottom and crashed with stunning force into the spiked fence. He lay still, in a breathless haze, while Cruach, who was uninjured, whined and licked his face.

At last, however, he recovered sufficiently to stand up. He looked down at his knee and saw blood oozing thickly from a covering of dirt and ashes.

He hated the sight of blood. A sick feeling came over him, adding to his physical and mental distress. If only there was someone to whom he could turn for help, someone to whom he could confide his troubles. But he was all alone, except for Cruach—and Cruach, after all, was only a puppy.

He was so shaken and frightened that suddenly he leaned his forehead against the fence and began to cry.

Through the spikes he could see the housing scheme and far beyond it a ridge of rolling hills. Those hills meant happiness and freedom. But at this moment, as the tears welled down across his cheeks, he felt he might never reach them.

Meanwhile, at Anniesland Cross, Red Jake paced backwards and forwards, wondering how his son had managed to slip through his fingers.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

He had certainly dodged into the station-entrance. But there had been no sign of him on the platform, and the stationmaster hadn't noticed him. It looked as if he had doubled back to the street along one of the side passages.

Red Jake glowered. Dinny had come off a tram-car. It was clear, therefore, that he had got hold of some money. In that case, there was nothing to prevent him taking a bus and going direct to Drumbeg. He might be on his way there already.

It was an awkward situation. The boy was too scared to go to the police of his own accord; but if Peter McKerral heard the true facts of the attempted robbery and the attack on the night-watchman, he would realise that Dinny had little to fear from the law and would get in touch with them at once. That would put him—Red Jake—definitely in a spot.

It occurred to him that his best plan would be to get in touch with the McKerrals before Dinny did—or as soon afterwards as possible—and supply them with an edited version of the affair at the factory. They were fond of the boy, and they'd hesitate to approach the police if they thought he was guilty of a serious crime.

Red Jake crossed to the other side of the street and waited for a bus to Loch Lomondside.

That afternoon Peter McKerral came in for tea about a quarter past four. His shirtsleeves were rolled

ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN

up, and his fair hair was sprinkled with wisps of hay, for he had been building ricks in the meadow.

His aunt put two boiled eggs on his plate. "Such lovely weather," she said. "I've been thinking all day about Dinny, cooped up in Glasgow."

"I know. Poor wee chap."

Mary McKerral sat down to pour the tea. "I had a letter today from Dr Jean. She's coming this evening for the week-end. Perhaps she'll have news."

Peter looked up quickly. "How's Jean?"

"Quite well, I think. But her job seems to be getting her down these days."

"I don't wonder. Being a city welfare officer wouldn't be my idea of fun at all. Especially if I had characters like Dinny's father and step-mother to deal with."

Casually Mary said: "I often think Jean's heart is here in the country. After a week-end with us she always looks so different—so happy."

Peter took the top off his second egg. His face betrayed no emotion as he replied: "Jean's heart is in her job, Aunt Mary. She likes the country all right, but she'd soon get fed up if she lived in it all the time."

A young servant-girl put her head into the room. "There's a man at the back door. He wants to see Mr McKerral."

"Who is it?" asked Peter, with some irritation. "A commercial traveller?"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"I—I don't think so."

"He's a confounded nuisance whoever he is—coming just at milking-time! However, show him in, Jessie. Then you'd better go and bring in the cows."

Though they had seen him only once before—when they were making arrangements in Glasgow for Dinny's convalescence at Drumbeg—Mary and Peter recognised Red Jake at once.

He came in with his cap on, his stout, pasty face glistening with sweat. "Where's Dinny?" he demanded.

"Dinny!" Mary looked suddenly anxious and afraid. "Why—what's happened?"

"He ran away."

"He certainly hasn't shown up at Drumbeg." Peter spoke sharply. "What made you think he would?"

"I had a hunch. He'd reckon he was safer here."

The anxious line grew deeper on Mary's forehead. "Safer from what?" she asked.

Red Jake didn't answer. Reflectively he rubbed the back of his hand against his chin.

Peter's eyes narrowed. "Have you told the police about it?"

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"Well"—Red Jake seemed to hesitate—"well, it just wouldn't do Dinny any good."

Mary caught her breath. "But he's an honest boy. He's got nothing to be afraid of from the police."

ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN

"That's what you think, lady!"

Peter frowned. "What are you getting at, Smith?"

"Well, he's my own son. There's things you don't like to talk about."

"If you want us to help you, you'd better tell the truth."

Red Jake sighed. "All right, I will. The fact is, Dinny got friendly with another kid at school, whose father's a crook. Me and his mother, we did our best to warn him. But no—'I'll pick my own friends', he says. Then this morning he's nowhere to be found, and his bed's not even been slept in. Me and his mother, we read in the papers there's been trouble last night at a factory in the Cowcaddens. A night-watchman got hurt, and the police say it was a gang of boys that did it."

He paused for breath, glancing shiftily from side to side. Better leave it at that, he thought. No good mentioning he had seen and pursued Dinny at Anniesland Cross. The simpler his story the more convincing it would sound.

"So you see," he went on, "it's no good going to the police. If Dinny's caught he'll be sent to Borstal for sure."

"What if he was forced into doing it?" said Peter, quietly.

Red Jake looked shiftier than ever. "That would be different. But he wasn't forced. I tell you, we've had a tough time with him. There's been—other things."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Mary flushed. "I don't believe a word of it! Dinny would never take part in a crime like that! The poor wee soul. Maybe he's frightened and wandering about by himself——"

"Just a minute, Aunt Mary." Peter was regarding his visitor with distaste. He went on: "I think it's quite likely that if he found himself in trouble Dinny would try to get here. And I agree with you, Smith—it might be better for his sake to keep the police out of it."

Inwardly Red Jake congratulated himself on the success of his story. He nodded and said: "You're a sensible man, Mr McKerral. I knew it."

Peter bit back an unfriendly retort. There was something fishy about the 'whole affair. But even though Red Jake might be spinning a yarn, it seemed obvious that criminal activities lurked in the background. And as far as possible Dinny ought to be protected from the unpleasantness of a police investigation. Provided, of course, that he didn't remain missing for too long.

"What are your plans?" he asked, abruptly.

Red Jake rubbed his chin. "Well, there's a bus for Glasgow due at the village in an hour. Seeing Dinny's not here, I think I'll go right back to Silver Street. Maybe he's turned up at home by now."

"If he has," Mary put in, quickly, "you'll let us know, won't you? I'll give you money to 'phone the post office in the village. They'll send us word."

ESCAPE FROM A TRAIN

Red Jake shook his head. "If me and his mother get our Dinny back we won't grudge the price of a phone-call."

But in spite of his unctuous voice something hard and cruel in his expression made her shiver.

"Right," said Peter. "We'll look out for him at this end. But I think you ought to phone Drumbeg Post Office in any case—as soon as you get back to Glasgow. I'll be there to take your call from about half-past seven. If neither of us has any news by then, we can decide what to do."

Mary offered Red Jake a cup of tea before he left. He accepted it with a promise of undying gratitude.

He felt better and more confident than he had done since morning. His visit to Drumbeg had been a success, and the arrangements which had been made suited him perfectly. His only danger now was that Dinny might be picked up by the police.

FRIEND 'IN NEED

FOR SOME time after his fall down the railway embankment, Dinny stood with Cruach, miserably looking through the iron fence.

At last, however, he told himself not to be a 'softie'. Wiping away his tears with the back of a grimy hand, he bent down and patted Cruach.

"We'd better go," he said, "or somebody will be asking us what we're doing here. I don't know where we are, but maybe the workmen over there will tell us."

They squeezed through the fence and crossed the open ground to where the new houses were being built. It was the lunch hour, and half-a-dozen young labourers were playing football on the grass, among piles of cement and loose bricks.

Dinny stopped to watch, waiting for an opportunity to speak to one of them. The ball came bouncing in his direction, a tall thin youngster hot in pursuit.

Cruach barked excitedly and jumped for the ball. The leash slipped from Dinny's fingers, and before he could prevent it the puppy had darted in front of the player.

The youngster's foot caught in the string, and he fell

heavily. He rose at once, and kicked out at Cruach. The puppy crouched in her tracks, whimpering with pain.

Dinny ran forward. "That's my dog!" he cried, passionately. "Don't hurt her!"

He went on his knees and held her in his arms. The young labourer glared at him. "If she's your dog, why the blazes don't you keep her under control?"

"It—it was an accident."

As he spoke Dinny looked up and discovered that the other players had gathered round in a half-circle. They were nearly all in their shirtsleeves, and they seemed to his imagination huge and evil and menacing. He stood up, clutching Cruach, and faced them with mounting terror.

Someone said: "Where did you get a dog like that, kid?"

Another player stepped forward. "Here—let's have a look at her."

But Dinny backed away, his arms tightening around the puppy. "No, no! She's mine!"

The youngster who had fallen felt that his injuries and loss of dignity had not yet been suitably revenged. Moving quickly, he caught the string round the puppy's neck and jerked her away from Dinny.

With cruel deliberation he began to strike her about the head with his closed fist. "That'll teach you!" he muttered.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Dinny rushed at him. "Don't, don't!" he cried. But the bully's knee caught him in the pit of the stomach, and he stumbled and fell sideways.

Some of the others laughed. But as Dinny got up, winded and frightened but still determined to battle for Cruach, a sturdy, broad-faced workman, some years older than the rest, came strolling across in their direction.

"That's enough, Jackie," he said, quietly. "Give the kid back his dog."

He was dressed like his mates in soiled dungarees, but there was authority in his voice. Jackie hesitated for only a second or two. Then he dropped the puppy on the ground and with ill-grace threw the leash to Dinny.

"That's better," said the newcomer, and added: "You fellows better get cracking. They're waiting for you at the canteen."

As they trooped off, oddly cowed and obedient, relief made Dinny's legs tremble. Even so, his wits were still clear enough to recognise something familiar about his new acquaintance. Surely he had seen him somewhere before?

"Did they hurt you, son?"

With Cruach in his arms again, Dinny found it impossible to bear a grudge. "Not much," he said. "It—it was Cruach's fault, really."

"What brought you here in the first place?"

"I lost my way."

FRIEND IN NEED

"You look as if you needed a good wash. Where d'you want to go?"

"To Drumbeg."

"Where's that?"

The man's friendly attitude was giving him more confidence. With a vague hand he pointed to the hills in the distance. "Near a big mountain called 'The Blacksmith'."

The other grinned, scratching his close-cropped head, and Dinny wondered again why the scar on his left cheek should remind him of something. "No wonder you're lost, son. 'The Blacksmith' is a long way from here."

Dinny plucked up his courage. "Please, could you tell me where to get a bus?"

"For Drumbeg, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, you could get one at Anniesland Cross, I expect. But that's a couple of miles away. Tell you what. I drive a lorry here. After dinner I'm going out to Dumbarton for some gravel. I'll take you as far as the end of the Boulevard. You'll get buses there all right."

Dinny smiled. "That's great," he said, simply.

His friend led him across the grass to the back door of the canteen—a long, wooden building painted a vivid yellow, from which the odour of cooked food drifted enticingly. He put his head inside and called out: "Are you there, Kate? Here's a young fellow

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

who needs looking after. Give him something to eat, will you? I'll be back to collect him in twenty minutes."

"Sure, Dave. Leave him to me."

Kate was a motherly person, stout and comfortable like Aunt Mary. She made him sit on a box near the door and exclaimed with surprise when she saw the state of his knees.

The kitchen was busy and full of noise, for it was the dinner-hour in the main part of the canteen; but Kate was like all capable women—even in the midst of a rush she could still concentrate on a single important job.

She put a cloth under the warm tap at the sink, rubbed soap on it and quickly cleaned the grime and blood from Dinny's legs. In a first-aid box above the stove she found a piece of adhesive plaster and stuck it on his injured knee.

Then she washed his face, probing with incisive fingers into the corners of his ears just as Aunt Mary would have done.

"That's a bit more tidy," she said, running a brisk comb through his tousled red hair. "What on earth have you been doing with yourself?"

But Dinny just smiled, and Kate was too busy to pursue the subject farther.

He was just finishing a plate of roast mutton, potatoes and cabbage—a generous portion of which he had fed to Cruach—when the man called Dave appeared at the door.

FRIEND IN NEED

"All set?" he asked. "The lorry's just outside."

Dinny climbed into the high cab beside him. Wagging her tail violently, Cruach stared out of the window with anticipation.

The lorry moved off, lurching on the uneven roadway. "Feeling better now?" said the driver, with a grin.

"Yes, thanks."

"You certainly look more respectable!"

Dinny glanced up at him as he worked the gears and steadied the jerking wheel. The scar on his cheek and the coarse texture of his skin might have given him an unpleasant appearance. But somehow that wasn't the case.

Then, as the lorry rolled on to a smoother road, Dinny suddenly remembered.

For a time a feeling of awe and hero-worship kept him tongue-tied. Finally, however, he blurted out: "I—I know who you are!"

Dave looked surprised. "A kid of your age—I bet you don't!"

"Yes, I do. You're Dave Morton. I've seen your photo in the papers—often and often. Uncle Peter at Drumbeg used to say you're the greatest boxer Scotland ever had."

The other smiled crookedly. "Your Uncle Peter wouldn't think so if he saw me now."

Dinny ignored that. "You were going to fight for the championship, weren't you?"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"I was. Then my little boy died of influenza, and—I and I gave up boxing for good."

"Gosh, I'm sorry."

"He'd be just about your age now."

There was a silence in the cabin. The lorry sped smoothly along a back street in Knightswood and eventually emerged on to the Dumbarton Boulevard.

At last Dinny said: "Won't you—won't you ever box again?"

Dave Morton shook his head. "When Billy died I threw in the towel. There's no going back."

Suddenly he smiled down at the earnest little face. "It's the same in everything, son. Once you give in you've had it. If you want to get anywhere you've got to keep going, no matter what happens."

Dinny thought of the dangers he might still encounter before he reached Drumbeg. But there was something in Dave Morton's words and manner that gave him courage.

"Uncle Peter will be awful interested," he said, "when he hears I met you."

Dave stopped where the road to Dumbarton turns left from the Boulevard.

"Here you are, son. You'll get a bus at the stop yonder—straight ahead. I don't know if you'll see many going as far as 'The Blacksmith', but there are plenty for Balloch and Loch Lomondside, and the conductor will tell you how to go on from there."

FRIEND IN NEED

Dinny thanked him. He climbed down to the footpath, trailing Cruach behind him, and waved eagerly as the lorry moved away. Then he crossed the road and walked to the bus stop.

Traffic whisked past. There were few pedestrians in this semi-rural area, and any that did appear showed no curiosity.

Gradually, as Dinny stood there, loneliness and fear began to trouble him once more. In Dave Morton's company he had forgotten to some extent that he was a fugitive, depending on his own efforts to reach safety at Drumbeg. Now daunting reality came back to him. What if his father should suddenly appear from nowhere, as he had done at Anniesland Cross? What if a policeman should come striding along the footpath and arrest him?

About a hundred yards ahead was a crossroads, where vehicles sometimes slowed down and stopped at a set of traffic-lights. When about a quarter of an hour had passed without any sign of a bus Dinny wondered unhappily if he shouldn't go there and try to beg a lift.

Then all at once he saw a car approaching which he recognised. Tense excitement flooded through his body, so that when it shot past he stood transfixed, unable to move or make any kind of signal.

But he had seen the driver, a slim girl in a neat blue suit. It was Dr Mathieson, without any doubt, —Dr Jean Mathieson on her way to Drumbeg!

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Suddenly he realised that the car was going to stop at the traffic-lights ahead. He burst into action.

“Come on, Cruach! Come on!”

He raced along the footpath, his small heart beating with desperate hope, his eyes on the distant traffic-lights still glowing red.

CAUGHT BY THE POLICE

AS HE ran along the footpath towards Jean's car, Dinny's heart was thudding with excitement. Cruach scampered beside him, her head and ears cocked up stiffly as if she had been infected by his desperate eagerness.

It was like a nightmare. The car still stood at the crossroads, vibrating gently as its engine ticked over. But at any moment the red traffic-lights might turn to green; at any moment it might speed away, leaving him behind.

He ran so fast that he was breathless before he had covered half the distance. The lights were still red, but to his taut and anxious mind he seemed to be making no progress.

He was about fifty yards from the car.

"Dr Mathieson!" he called; but his voice quivered and broke as he gulped for breath.

Suddenly, for some unaccountable reason, Cruach darted across in front of him. The leash got entangled about his legs, and he fell on the stone-encrusted earth of the footpath.

Cruach yelped as his head struck hers. She ran off into the roadway, trailing the leash behind her.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Dinny got up, more confused than ever, his attention cruelly divided between the car and the puppy. And just then the traffic-lights turned to green.

"Dr Mathieson!" he cried, in shrill despair. "Dr Mathieson!"

But she didn't hear him. The black car jerked forward and shot away on the road to Loch Lomond-side.

For a few seconds he stood watching it disappear, his heart numb with disappointment. Luck was against him. Had he been able to catch up, he and Cruach would by this time have been travelling towards Drumbeg. His troubles would have been over. His fear of his father and the police would have been lifted from his mind like a black shadow.

He had no doubt that Dr Mathieson was on her way to Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter; and it was a bitter experience to have missed her by so small a margin.

But he didn't have time to cry. He had Cruach's safety to think about.

She was straying across the Boulevard, hurt and frightened after what had happened. In the middle of the road opposite, which dealt with incoming traffic, she stopped and sat down.

Dinny saw a long black car speeding in her direction. He hurried over to the green strip of grass dividing the dual carriageway, heedless of the new

CAUGHT BY THE POLICE

scratches on his knees. But he was too late. The black car was almost on Cruach already.

It drew up with a squeal of brakes and a slight swerve; and as a man got out wearing a blue uniform and white-topped cap Dinny realised to his dismay that it was a police patrol-car.

The policeman bent down and lifted Cruach, wrapping her leash round his arm as he did so. Then he began to walk back to the car.

For Dinny a time of decision had come.

Neither the policeman nor his companion inside the car had seen him, and if he cared to move off he would probably remain unnoticed. But if that happened Cruach would be taken away, and he might never see her again.

What was he to do? Leave Cruach to her fate or risk his own freedom by approaching the police?

He began to tremble. Coming on top of the emotional crisis caused by his fleeting glimpse of Dr Mathieson, this new uncertainty was almost more than he could bear.

Ideas flickered in his mind. It would be easier for him to reach Drumbeg alone, without the responsibility of the puppy. That was fairly evident. And yet—and yet if he abandoned her now she would be lonely and sad without him. He would be buying his own safety at the expense of her happiness.

Then she whimpered and struggled in the policeman's arms and looked towards him. Even at a

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

distance of some twenty yards, her eyes seemed to plead for rescue, and in a split second all his doubts were resolved. His fear of the law—of its power to hand him back to his father—was momentarily submerged by his love for Cruach.

He ran towards the policeman. "That's my dog," he called out.

The policeman was young, ruddy-faced, with black leather leggings.

"What's the idea," he said, "letting her loose on the Boulevard?"

"The—the leash slipped."

"Well, you'd better not let it slip again. She might have caused a nasty accident."

He was about to hand her over, when the driver of the car called to him: "Say, Jock—that kid's got red hair. And he looks as if he'd been through the wars."

Jock hesitated. "You're right there, Donald. The sergeant did mention red hair, didn't he?"

"Aye. And he's the right age, too. About nine or ten."

"And his name might be Dinny Smith, according to the report from the baker's shop."

Dinny started to tremble again. He put his arms out for Cruach, but the policeman made no further move to give her up.

"What's your name?" he asked, sharply.

Dinny didn't answer. He hung his head and shifted his feet. He wanted to run, to escape into the high

CAUGHT BY THE POLICE

wood on the other side of the road; but he couldn't do that without his puppy.

Cars whipped past, their drivers glancing with momentary curiosity at the little tableau on the grass verge.

The policeman frowned. "Hear what I said? What's your name?"

Still Dinny remained silent.

"Come on—what are you doing here with this dog?"

"I—I don't want to say anything."

"Why?"

Though he fought hard against them, tears came stinging into Dinny's eyes. The policeman looked big and fierce. At any moment he might lift a hand and strike—as Red Jake would strike.

Nevertheless, Dinny was determined not to reveal his identity. If he did, he'd find himself back with his father before the day was out—and he knew what to expect from his father.

"What's the matter with you?" Jock's fierceness was now tempered by a certain involuntary sympathy. His official manner camouflaged an affection for all small boys, and in spite of this one's irritating silence he couldn't help feeling sorry for him. "We won't eat you," he added. "Just tell us your name and where you come from—then everything will probably be all right. If you don't we'll have to take you to the station."

Dinny made no reply, and the driver put his head

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

out of the side-window of the car. "Don't waste time," he said, irritably. "Take him in—and the dog, too. He's got something on his mind. That's obvious."

Dinny looked up. His lower lip was quivering. "Please—please, I don't want to go. I just want Cruach."

As the puppy struggled in the crook of his arm, Jock's face grew ruddier still. This wasn't the usual reaction of a young delinquent, and he found himself oddly disturbed. But a small red-headed boy was implicated in the Cowcaddens affair, and he had his duty to do. He put out his free hand and caught Dinny by the collar of his jersey.

"Come on," he commanded, gruffly. "You'll have to explain to the sergeant."

JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND

COMPLETELY UNAWARE of what was going on behind her on the Boulevard, Jean pressed her foot on the accelerator as she put her car at the long hill outside Alexandria.

She was in a happy mood.

The sun was shining on the green cornfields on her right. To her left the waters of the Clyde sparkled clear and fresh, chasing from her mind the drab memories of her medical work in the slums.

For three days she was off the leash. For three days she was going to enjoy herself at Drumbeg, where "caller" air, homely food and normal healthy company would make her forget for a while the mental and physical sickness which it was her daily task to curb and cure.

You couldn't help feeling better in Mary McKerral's house, she thought. Mary was so sensible, so kind. You felt confident and safe just to hear her speak.

As for her nephew, Peter . . . Jean sighed a little. Ever since they were children, playing together, they had taken each other for granted. Now he had his farm, and she had her job in Glasgow. They were always happy in each other's company, but as time

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

went on it seemed to become more and more evident that their ways would lie apart. All the same, her foot came down just a little more forcibly on the accelerator at the idea that, for the week-end at least, she would be near him, sharing his work and play.

Her one regret was that this time there would be no Dinny at Drumbeg.

She was troubled about Dinny: Since his return to Glasgow she had twice visited the flat in Silver Street. Both times he had been out, but his step-mother had assured her that he was well and happy. Well physically he might be, but she had doubts about his happiness. Could any child grow up with a healthy mind under the influence of Red Jake?

There was, however, nothing she could do about it. Dinny was Red Jake's son, and under the present circumstances neither she nor the law had any right to interfere with their relationship.

Another reason for her regret at Dinny's absence was that he had always helped to bring her and Peter closer together. His natural, childish ways seemed to revive their own innocent youth and create between them a happiness which was neither forced nor artificial.

Again Jean sighed. Loch Lomond with its green jewelled islands began to spread out on her right. Far in the distance, wreathed in a wispy haze, the peak of "The Blacksmith" rose high above the surrounding hills.

JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND

It was half-past six by the time she arrived at Drumbeg, and the milking was over. Peter was shaving and having a bath, but Mary welcomed her with a warm kiss and accompanied her upstairs to her usual room.

While she changed from her travelling suit to a jersey and slacks her hostess told her of the disturbing visit they had received from Red Jake.

"I don't like him, Jean." Mary spoke simply, smoothing back her hair. "I'm sure it's his fault that Dinny's disappeared. He says Dinny took part in a robbery with some other boys. But I can't believe it. Dinny's not wicked."

Jean was deeply concerned. "I agree with you, Mary. And he's terrified of his father, though he tries not to show it. Don't you think we should go to the police?"

"Peter is against it—in the meantime, at any rate."

"Why?"

"Well, he thinks there's more behind it all than Jake Smith cares to admit. And if Dinny's got mixed up with anything criminal he says it's our duty to protect him as far as we can."

Jean stood before the mirror, slim and straight. Running a comb through her thick dark hair she said: "He's probably right. But we can't simply sit back and do nothing."

"I know, dear. Actually, Dinny's father promised

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

to ring up the post office in the village as soon as he got back to Glasgow. Peter will be there to take the call from about seven o'clock. If there's still no news of Dinny at Silver Street, he'll decide then what to do."

"I see." Jean came across and put her arms round Mary's ample shoulders. "That's the sensible thing, of course. I'll take Peter down to the village in my car."

Ten minutes later she drove off through a scurrying crowd of white chickens in the yard. Beside her, Peter said: "Thank goodness you've come, Jean. We've been worried to death about Dinny."

More to comfort him than from any real conviction, she replied that there was bound to be news about him soon. "Red Jake will probably tell you he's back at Silver Street by now."

"That would worry me, too," he said, soberly.

"I know." She changed gear to negotiate the steep hill winding down into the village. "If only we could take Dinny away from that house. But we can't, Peter. We can't interfere between father and son."

"It's all wrong!" he exclaimed. "He may not break Dinny physically. But morally he will."

"That's what we're up against. But strange things happen, Peter. Environment doesn't always win the trick. And Dinny has one advantage. He has seen a better side of life. It may give him courage to hold out."

JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND

"If Red Jake was a convicted criminal we could do something, couldn't we?"

"Yes. Especially since Nellie Smith is only Dinny's step-mother. You could apply to the courts on Dinny's behalf, and the Sheriff might decide he was 'in need of care and protection', as they call it, and appoint you his legal guardian. The trouble is, Jake Smith is not a convicted criminal. We've no concrete proof either that he's been ill-treating his son."

For a time Peter was silent. Then he said: "You know, Jean, I've a queer feeling—as if Dinny is trying to escape, knowing it's his last chance."

She brought the car to a stop outside the post office. "That may be," she nodded, gravely. "I wonder if there's any news?"

The call from Red Jake came through about a quarter-past seven. There was nothing to report from Silver Street; and when Peter admitted that Dinny hadn't turned up at Drumbeg either, Red Jake's voice began to sound genuinely anxious.

His anxiety, of course, concerned the possibility that the police might get hold of Dinny before he did himself and discover the truth about the attack on the night-watchman.

Peter, however, didn't know this. He said: "Don't you think we ought to tell the police after all?"

"No, no!" Red Jake spoke urgently across the wire. "I tell you he's in trouble. We want to keep the police out of it."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"But he may have had an accident. He may be in hospital."

"Not Dinny. He's tough. He's scared—that's what's wrong. I reckon he and those other kids coshed the night-watchman."

"Well then, why don't you get in touch with those other kids? Ask them about Dinny——"

"I've done that already," lied Red Jake. "It was the first thing I did when I came back home this evening. But they won't talk."

Peter was troubled. Instinct told him that Dinny would never voluntarily act as a criminal. But reason made him cautious. By some mischance he might have become involved in a crime and be liable to prosecution. If so it would be prudent to try and find out what had actually happened before approaching the police.

Reluctantly he said: "Why don't you try again? Those kids, I mean. Bully them—threaten them with the law if they don't tell you about Dinny."

"Sure, sure!" returned Red Jake, quickly. "I'll tear them apart, the little blighters!"

"Keep at them, and let me know the result. You can wire me in the morning. If he shows up here I'll let you know at once."

"Thanks, Mr McKerral." The voice on the wire was full of synthetic goodwill. "It's a great comfort to me and Nellie in our trouble that we've got such good friends at Drumbeg."

JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND

That was enough for Peter. Abruptly he hung up.

Outside in the car Jean was waiting for him. "When you were in the post office the evening papers came by the bus," she told him. "A night-watchman did get knocked out in the Cowcaddens last night."

She showed him an item of news on the front page, and as he read the final sentences a chill of uneasiness came over him. "On recovering consciousness the night-watchman stated that just before he was attacked a small boy of about nine or ten years of age ran past him towards the gate. He was wearing a blue jersey and shorts and had untidy red hair. The police are anxious to get in touch with this boy, who may be able to give them valuable information."

"So part of Red Jake's story was true after all." A worried line appeared on his forehead.

Jean was worried, too; but she tried not to show it. "That man could never tell the truth," she returned, quickly. "And of course this news may not refer to Dinny at all. I've been thinking, Peter. I'm sure we ought to go and question that night-watchman ourselves."

He glanced at her doubtfully. "What good would that do?"

"Well, he might be able to describe the boy in a little more detail. If we were certain it was Dinny he saw we'd know better what to do."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Slowly he nodded. "I believe you're right, Jean. And there's just a chance that though it hasn't been reported in the paper he may have caught a glimpse of the person who attacked him. The police would probably want to suppress information like that, so as to lull the criminal into a false sense of security."

She hesitated, then spoke with professional calm. "I should think the watchman will be in the Cowcaddens Hospital. It's not far from the factory. We could get there in the car in just about an hour and a half."

"That would be about nine o'clock. Would we be allowed to see him so late?"

"As I'm a doctor I think they'd stretch a point. I know the matron quite well, as a matter of fact."

"Of course." Fleetinglly he smiled at her. "I forgot you're a big noise in the medical world."

"I wish you'd forget it more often," she said, involuntarily. Then she pressed the self-starter and continued: "We'll go back now and tell Mary what we intend to do. Then you'd better hold on to your hat, Peter!"

Two hours before, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, Dinny and Cruach had been taken from the patrol-car and escorted into a police station on the Boulevard.

JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND

The sergeant, it appeared, had gone out; and while they waited for his return the policeman called Jock persuaded the bar-officer to make them a cup of tea. Dinny munched his bread-and-butter silently, feeding an occasional scrap to Cruach lying between his feet and wondering how he could possibly escape from this predicament.

He sat on the edge of a wooden bench, dishevelled and forlorn; and Jock, who was more soft-hearted than any policeman has a right to be, felt sorrier for him than ever. What thoughts were passing inside that drooping little head?

The charge-room was bleak and uncomfortable. But the sun was shining outside, and as Jock finished his tea an impulsive idea occurred to him. Small boys hated being indoors on a good day. This one might be soothed and encouraged if he were taken out into the garden behind the station. No harm in that, surely. In fact, the reverse might be true. If treated in a friendly way, the boy might be much readier to talk when the sergeant arrived.

So Jock argued with himself, knowing quite well that the proper procedure was to keep the child safely in the charge-room, until such time as he could be interrogated. But for once his kindly nature—and his own liking for the open air—overcame his official scruples.

He smiled across at Dinny. "Like to see the garden, kid?"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Dinny looked up. *For the first time he detected warm friendliness in a policeman's voice.* "Yes," he whispered.

"All right, come on! But keep that dog of yours on the leash."

The garden was the pride of the local force. As he lived on the premises, the bar-officer was primarily responsible for it; but all the other policemen on the station lent him a hand on occasions. The result was a glorious mass of flowers—lupins and hollyhocks, asters, begonias and gladioli, all in their separate plots on a smoothly shaven lawn.

Remembering the soot and grime of the backyard in Silver Street, Dinny drew in an involuntary breath of surprise and pleasure.

The air was clear and unsullied by dust. Behind the garden was a thick pine-wood, and a faint aromatic perfume drifted across from it.

"Lovely, isn't it?" said Jock, himself a countryman.

Dinny nodded. Cruach was nosing towards an interesting bed of lupins, but he kept a tight grip of the leash and held her back.

The place was surrounded by a solid wooden fence, painted green and about ten feet high. But in a corner by the toolshed Dinny noticed a narrow opening where a single rotted plank had been taken out.

The space left was no more than four feet high by eighteen inches wide; but it suddenly came to him

JEAN AND PETER TAKE A HAND

that he and Cruach might be able to squeeze through. Beyond the opening was the pine-wood.

Jock's conscience pricked him, and he decided to become a policeman again. Cunningly he said: "I don't suppose you have a garden where you come from?"

But Dinny wasn't to be drawn. He kept silent. To himself he was thinking: "Can I do it? Can I get through that opening? If Cruach and I did manage it, the policeman would have to run round to the gate to follow us. That would give us time to reach the wood."

"What's biting you?" Jock was becoming slightly irritable again. "We're not going to hurt you. I'm trying to show you that we're your friends."

Dinny liked Jock. He was a different kind of policeman. But very soon others would come who would shout at him and ask about his father. That Sergeant, for instance.

As he looked towards the opening he found himself shaking. Could he risk it?

Then he thought of Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter and Dr Mathieson at Drumbeg. He thought of the quiet, whitewashed farmhouse -with "The Blacksmith" towering behind it- which symbolised all the comfort and happiness he knew. Suddenly he realised that to attain such comfort and happiness any risk at all was well worth while.

He recalled a trick he had learned at school.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

“What’s that over there?” he said, pointing away from the toolshed.

Unsuspecting, Jock turned his head. “What thing—and where?” he asked.

In that moment, pulling hard on Cruach’s leash, Dinny made a dash for the opening in the fence.

'PIT-PROPS LTD'

JOCK, THE policeman, was taken completely by surprise. He turned round to find Dinny and the pup, running as fast as their legs could carry them, already half-way towards the hole in the fence.

"Stop!" he jerked out. "What the blazes——"

But as he spoke the pair reached the narrow opening, struggled through and disappeared in the direction of the pine-wood outside.

Jock felt both angry and apprehensive. Angry because he had been trying to be kind to the small boy and his kindness—as he thought—had been callously betrayed. Apprehensive because if the boy escaped, the sergeant would have something particularly unpleasant to say.

It was obvious at once that with his bulk he couldn't follow Dinny through the fence. He dashed towards the gate, therefore, which was some fifty yards away to the right. But by the time he had opened it and run round to the end of the garden opposite the wood, there was no sign of his quarry.

"Come back, you!" he shouted.

The only answer was a rustle of wind among the trees.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

He stopped to listen. But the traffic which constantly whipped past on the Boulevard outside the police station was an effective camouflage for any sound in the wood, and he heard nothing to indicate the boy's whereabouts.

Jock ran in among the trees, looking around; but the undergrowth was plentiful and thick, and it soon became apparent that he was wasting his time. An alert, intelligent boy could easily dodge a single pursuer. What he required were one or two assistants. Between them they could beat the wood thoroughly and drive the little rascal out into the open again.

Reluctantly he decided that he would have to go back to the station and enlist the help of any other constables who were available. This would mean reporting his failure to maintain the boy in custody. But in the circumstances it just couldn't be helped.

As he hurried towards the garden gate Jock assigned all small boys to perdition. You couldn't help liking them. At times you couldn't help feeling sorry for them. Then, when you least expected it, they let you down with a thump.

While Jock was crashing through the wood, searching for him, Dinny had been hiding in a gorse bush on its outskirts. Cruach had been inclined to whimper; but he had kept a firm hand over her muzzle, preventing even the slightest sound which might give them away.

When the policeman returned to the garden, muttering to himself, Dinny got up at once, and, with Cruach on the leash, began to run farther in among the pines. He didn't spare himself. His instinct was to get as far away from the police station as possible—as soon as possible.

By the time he reached a clearing in the centre, where felling and trimming operations had been in progress, he was panting with his efforts, and Cruach's red tongue was hanging out.

He had no clear plan of escape; but as he stood there on the edge of the clearing, surveying the piles of trimmed tree-trunks, he heard the growl of an approaching tractor, and the glimmering of an idea occurred to him.

The tractor, driven by a youngish man in khaki overalls, came lurching and swaying into the clearing, dragging behind it a long trailer with high sides. Having manœuvred his vehicle into position, the driver got out and began to load up with some of the smaller logs.

Dinny noted that most of these were a good deal shorter than the length of the trailer and that as the load grew a space was being left between them and the rear door.

Concealed in a thicket of green bracken he whispered in Cruach's ear: "When the driver goes to start his tractor we'll nip across and climb into the back of the trailer. He won't hear us above the noise of the

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

engine, and even if he does turn round the logs will hide us."

The loading took only a few minutes. But when he had finished the driver paused to light a cigarette. He leaned back against one of the piles of wood and drew a satisfying lungful of smoke.

He was in no hurry to move, and Dinny began to grow more and more anxious. Soon he was listening for any sound of pursuit among the trees behind him.

But the driver smoked on. Cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth, he fished a penknife from his pocket and began to whittle a small piece of wood.

To Dinny, crouching among the bracken, the seconds seemed like minutes. Aunt Mary at Drumbeg had taught him to say his prayers. He said them now to himself, remembering unselfishly to ask a blessing on everyone he liked. Then he added a postscript: "Please bless the driver of the tractor, too—and make him hurry up."

He said "Amen" and opened his eyes. But the driver remained where he was, whittling the twig in the quiet peace of the pine-wood. A blackbird was singing in a bush across the clearing.

And then Dinny's sharp ears caught the sound he had been waiting for—a distant shout behind him. He could even recognise Jock's voice: "Take the left-hand side, Davie. George can beat up the ridge of bracken."

His arms tightened around Cruach. He kept watching the driver, willing him to start up the tractor before the shouting got any nearer. His eyes began to smart—not with tears, but with the unblinking concentration of his stare.

The wood was quiet again, though Dinny could imagine the policemen crawling nearer and nearer through the undergrowth. But as he waited, strained and desperate, the driver—who had obviously heard nothing—spat the cigarette-stub from his mouth, shut his knife with a snap and strode across to the tractor. It was as if he had suddenly realised he was being unpardonably idle.

The engine started with a cough and a roar.

"Now!" whispered Dinny in Cruach's ear.

Clutching her under one arm, he rose from the bracken and raced across the clearing. As he reached the trailer the driver was stamping on the clutch-pedal and juggling with the gears.

Dinny threw Cruach into the space behind the logs and scrambled up after her, just as the tractor jerked forward. He was thrown hard against the side of the trailer, bruising his knees. But he scarcely noticed the pain. Shielding Cruach from the violent lurching, he huddled below the level of the rear door. As long as no one actually looked in over the edge he was invisible; and in spite of his discomfort this knowledge made him sigh with relief.

At first the track led steeply downhill through the

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

pine-wood, away from the police station. It was deeply rutted, and before long Dinny was feeling sore and shaken.

Then the machine slewed round on to a tarmac road, and with the smoother movement he forgot his aches and began to wonder where the driver was going. Could he and Cruach escape from the trailer before the man spotted them?

It would be impossible to jump clear while the tractor was travelling at its present speed. In addition, the road was fairly busy, with cars and lorries passing and overtaking them, and if he showed himself above the rear door he would—as he thought—be spotted and caught at once.

Eventually the tractor slowed down and made a quick turn to the right. The trailer lurched and swayed again, and from his hiding-place Dinny glimpsed tall piles of timber. He realised it was some kind of yard or depot, and just as the driver jerked his vehicle to a stop he caught sight of a sign above a doorway: PIT-PROPS LTD—ENGINEER DEPT.

He was about to glance cautiously over the side when the engine was switched off and he heard the driver's voice: "Hi, Jimmy—can I leave this here?"

"Sure, Bob. You're not unloading tonight?"

"No—first thing in the morning. It's nearly half-past six."

"Okay. She'll do there. I'll be locking up pretty soon. How's the wife?"

"PIT-PROPS LTD"

"A bit better, Jimmy. But this summer 'flu takes it out of you."

The voices moved off. Dinny stayed where he was, in the dark space at the back of the trailer.

Long afterwards he heard a crunch of footsteps passing by; then a clang and a rattle as the main gates of the yard were shut and locked.

Suddenly it became very still and quiet. Dinny yawned and rubbed his eyes.

A VISIT TO HOSPITAL

JEAN AND PETER, having told Mary what they intended to do, were now on the first stage of their journey by car to Glasgow.

As might be expected in a doctor, Jean was neat and precise in her driving. Peter was amazed at the speed with which she negotiated the bends on Loch Lomond-side; but not once did he feel that the car was even slightly out of control.

Shortly after nine o'clock they drew up in the Cowcaddens Hospital car-park. Jean lead the way to the inquiry office.

Luckily the Matron was in, enjoying an off-duty cigarette and cup of tea. She was a tall woman of about forty, with smoothly-dressed dark hair and a formidable tilt of the head. But when she saw Jean she smiled, and her whole appearance was transformed.

"Goodness—Dr Mathieson! Don't say you're bringing a patient at this time of night. Such a healthy looking patient, too!"

Jean smiled, too. "No—this is Peter McKerral, a friend of mine. We've come to ask a favour."

"Certainly. What can I do for you?"

A VISIT TO HOSPITAL

"First of all, we'd like to know if you admitted a patient in the early hours of this morning—a night-watchman from a factory."

The Matron nodded at once. "Yes. John Fleming. Head injuries and slight concussion. The police have questioned him twice."

Jean stepped forward and caught her arm. "Could you possibly stretch a point and let us have a word with him as well?"

"Just now, you mean?"

"Yes, please."

"That would be quite irregular, I'm afraid. Besides, he's probably asleep."

Jean stood her ground. "It's most important, Matron. The whole future of a little boy may depend on us seeing him. We've come seventy-five miles——"

"By car?"

"Yes. Both Peter and I would be most grateful if we could speak to him—just for a moment."

Beside the regal figure of the Matron she looked absurdly young in her slacks and pale blue cardigan. But the urgency and sincerity in her voice were beyond question.

The older woman hesitated. Then she said: "All right, my dear—since you're a doctor. I'll see to it myself. Help yourselves to a cup of tea till I come back."

Ten minutes later Jean and Peter tiptoed into a

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

darkened ward. Its atmosphere was cool and antiseptically fresh. A young nurse met them at the door and conducted them to John Fleming's bed, which had been surrounded by temporary screens.

Though his head was swathed in bandages, he seemed to have recovered well from the attack of the previous night.

"Is it the police again?" he asked, a shade gruffly.

"No—and we're sorry to disturb you, Mr Fleming," said Peter. "But I think you may be able to help us. I believe that just before you were attacked you saw a small red-headed boy running away?"

"Aye—he looked scared to death." The night-watchman eased himself on his pillows, apparently not averse to an unofficial gossip about his adventures.

"Dae ye think ye ken him?"

"I'm pretty sure we do."

"Then why come tae me? Why no' inform the police?"

Jean leaned forward. "The little boy is a friend of ours, Mr Fleming. We don't want to approach the police until—until we know more about what happened."

He nodded as if he understood. "Aye, well, I canna tell ye much. Just what I tellt the police this mornin'. I heard a noise an' cam' runnin' across the yaird tae the back door o' the office. The wee boy passed me. Then as I reached the door something hit me hard on the heid."

A VISIT TO HOSPITAL

"And that's all you remember?"

"That's all, miss, till I wakened up in here."

Peter wrinkled his forehead. "What was the little boy like exactly?"

"Well, he'd be about nine or ten—tousy red heid, freckles, and a blue jersey and grey shorts."

Jean nodded, remembering that when he left Drumbeg Dinny had been wearing a blue jersey and grey shorts.

Peter went on: "Haven't you got any idea who hit you? Didn't you catch a glimpse of anyone lurking at the office door as you approached it?"

John Fleming put a hand to his stubby moustache and smoothed it. "I did," he replied, at last. "An' I tellt the police about it. It cam' tae me this efternoon when my heid got a bit better."

"Go on," said Peter, quietly.

"Well, it's maybe just my imagination, but I'm thinkin' I saw a shoe stickin' out frae behind the door."

"A shoe?" exclaimed Jean.

"Aye. And a gey funny shoe!"

Peter's eyes shone in the dim light. "Tell us about it," he said.

"It was brown canvas an' tied wi' a piece o' white string instead o' a lace. A man's shoe."

"You're quite sure it wasn't a child's?"

"If I'm no' imaginin' the whole thing it was definitely a man's. Big an' broad at the toe."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Thanks," said Peter. "You've helped us a lot."

He put a crinkling note under the night-watchman's pillow. "I see from the ash-tray that you smoke cigarettes," he went on, smiling. "Have a hundred on us!"

By the time they said goodnight to the Matron and got back to the car-park it was almost a quarter to ten. Jean had been the driving-force at the outset of the expedition. Now she handed over the leadership to Peter.

"So our hunch was right after all," she said, settling into the driving-seat. "What's our next move?"

He hesitated, but only for a moment. "I don't know about you," he replied, "but I'm pretty certain now that Red Jake was the villain of the piece. He forced Dinny to take part in the attempted burglary. Then when they were disturbed he coshed the night-watchman. But we have no proof."

"There's the shoe laced up with string," she suggested. "Did you notice if he was wearing canvas shoes when he visited Drumbeg this afternoon?"

"He wasn't. Ordinary leather. But that doesn't signify. If we found a shoe answering to John Fleming's description in his house——"

"We can't go searching in his house without authority."

"That's just the point, Jean."

"Do you think we should go to the police about it?"

"No. John Fleming has already told them. Besides,

A VISIT TO HOSPITAL

we don't know how deeply Dinny's involved in this business, and as things stand, if the police got hold of him they'd probably just hand him back to his father—the very thing we want to avoid." He paused for a second, then quietly went on: "If *we* found him, however, we might be able to prove that Red Jake is a criminal and therefore unfit to look after his son. The trouble is, we haven't the faintest idea where Dinny is at the moment."

"Somewhere between here and the farm." Jean pressed the self-starter. "We must keep our eyes and ears open. Red Jake will be in exactly the same position. At this moment he's probably scouring the roads between here and 'The Blacksmith'."

She let in the clutch and the car moved off on the dark road back to Drumbeg.

An hour later, as they passed along the darkened main street of Bartonhill, Peter saw a man standing at a corner. It suddenly struck him that the stranger had looked like Red Jake. He spoke to Jean, who immediately turned the car. By the time they got back to the corner, however, the man had disappeared.

Half-a-mile farther along the road they passed a series of low buildings on the right-hand side, with the sign **PIT-PROPS LTD.** prominently displayed at the main gate. They didn't know it, but inside the corrugated iron fence there stood a tractor with a trailer-load of wood. At the back of the trailer Dinny still slept with Cruach in his arms.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

· In fact, the sun was already shining when at last he woke up. For a time he had no idea where he was. It crossed his mind that he was back at the house in Silver Street, with Red Jake and his step-mother. But the panic which this caused inside him immediately chased away sleep and brought him back to reality.

Cruach wakened, too. They both sat up in the trailer and looked out over its rear door. The yard was empty, for it was scarcely more than five o'clock, and the employees of Pit-Props Ltd would not be arriving until eight.

Cautiously Dinny climbed down from the trailer, lifting Cruach along with him. He felt very much alone in the big enclosed yard. Piles of wood lay everywhere, and his imagination conjured up enemies behind each one of them.

But nothing stirred, and at last he found enough courage to move across by the main offices towards the gate. But the gate was locked and topped by strands of barbed wire, making it impossible for him to climb.

He looked round the corrugated iron fence. It was so high that he could see nothing beyond it, and for a moment he was afraid he was going to be trapped inside.

Then he saw that a stack of untrimmed logs had been built against a corner at the rear of the premises. Soothing Cruach, who was inclined to whimper, he ran across the yard and scrambled up on the logs.

A VISIT TO HOSPITAL

At this point he was level with the top of the fence and could see green fields with occasional small houses dotted here and there. Behind him—outside the main gate—the broad road to the west lay like a dark ribbon. At this hour of the morning it was completely empty of traffic.

The distance from the pile of logs to the top of the fence was only about two yards. Unfortunately the corrugated iron was cut into a series of sharp teeth, and for some time Dinny wondered how he could possibly climb over.

Presently, however, he noticed a small tarpaulin lying folded at the foot of the pile. Telling Cruach to wait for him, he clambered down, dragged the tarpaulin up after him and flung it, still folded thickly, across the jagged teeth.

He leaned forward, set Cruach on the tarpaulin and ordered her to jump. When she whined and refused, he hardened his heart and pushed. She fell on the outside of the fence with a short, sharp bark of dismay.

Next moment, levering himself across the tarpaulin on his tummy, he landed beside her.

There was a herd of cattle in the field, steadily cropping the dewy grass. He looked anxiously to discover if there was a bull among them; but he couldn't see one.

"Come on," he said urgently to Cruach. Leading her by the string, he ran round the corner of the fence

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

and reached the main road by climbing a low white paling.

He now found himself faced by another difficulty. In which direction did Drumbeg lie? His adventures of the previous afternoon, and his journey in the trailer, had completely upset his sense of direction.

He looked about him. Half-a-mile along the road to the left he saw the straggling houses of a small village, and it occurred to him that he might find something there—a bus stop or a direction sign—which would provide him with the information he wanted.

As quickly as he could, dragging a reluctant Cruach, he made his way along the footpath. Every few seconds he glanced back to see if he was being followed; but the whole countryside was quiet and still. On his left, between the path and the paling, was a deep ditch filled with hemlock. Into this he was prepared to jump, if it became necessary to conceal himself.

As he approached the village he saw several people standing at a corner, and he guessed correctly that they were workmen waiting for a bus.

He stopped and hid himself in the close-mouth of a tenement. A chill morning wind blew through the stone-paved passage, making him shiver as he waited. He had eaten nothing since the previous afternoon at the police station, and hunger now began to make

A VISIT TO HOSPITAL

itself felt. Cruach lay at his feet and went to sleep again, and in a way he envied her.

Then there was a stir among the men at the corner, and a bus came swinging past, moving in from the direction he had come. The sign above the driver's seat said GLASGOW.

So the way to Loch Lomondside—to "The Blacksmith" and Drumbeg—lay the opposite way, beyond Pit-Props Ltd.

Dinny watched the bus stopping and the men climbing aboard. As it started off again he jerked Cruach into wakefulness, and they left the close-mouth, ready to retrace their steps. But as they hesitated rather forlornly on the empty pavement, Dinny caught sight of a man on the opposite side of the street. He was standing at another stopping-place, this one for a bus to Loch Lomondside.

At the same moment the man caught sight of him. For a few seconds they remained motionless. Then Dinny sobbed in his throat. It came to him that his father must have stayed in the village the previous night, intending to look for him along the road to Drumbeg. But almost at once his sole concern became that of escape.

As Red Jake signalled with a threatening arm and began to move across the street, Dinny turned.

"Run, Cruach!" he whispered.

Without thinking, he raced in through the close-mouth, the puppy panting at his side. At the back of

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

the tenement they emerged near a line of allotments. He crawled through the lettuce and cabbage beds and scrambled across a low wall, dragging Cruach after him.

Red Jake appeared behind them out of the close.

"Dinny!" he shouted. "Come back! I'll not hurt you. Your mother and me—we want you back."

But Dinny was impervious to this hypocritical appeal. Beyond the wall was a stretch of open ground leading to the ruins of an old castle. He and Cruach sprinted across this. His legs were trembling; but he went doggedly on until he reached the crumbling walls.

He paused to see Red Jake climbing out from the allotments. Next moment he turned on his heel and rushed into the dark lower premises of the building, paying no heed to the musty smell of damp and decay inside.

A deep hole yawned at his feet—with steps leading down to what might be a dungeon.

SANDY DONALDSON

DINNY DIDN'T know it till long afterwards, but the ruined building which had offered him a precarious refuge was the ancient Castle of Barton-hill, a favourite haunt of antiquarians. During his campaign for Scotland's freedom William Wallace had been imprisoned in its dungeon.

As Dinny hurried down the dark and slippery steps, however, the atmosphere of old history failed to impress him. Present fears filled his mind.

At the foot of the stairs it was black as ink after the bright sunshine outside. He crouched down by a damp pillar, holding his breath and clutching Cruach. In the distance he could hear his father's footsteps, slowly approaching the entrance-shaft above his head.

The seconds passed and his eyes grew accustomed to the dark. Vaguely he was aware that a certain amount of light was coming in from the stairs and from a small barred opening at the far end of the dungeon.

Red Jake was coming nearer, his shoes crunching among the tumbled masonry outside. Dinny grew tense and stiff. Had his father noticed him disappearing down the steps? Or did he imagine he had

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

gone to ground in some other part of the ruined castle?

He shivered and thought to himself how different this was from hide-and-seek with Dr Mathieson and Uncle Peter. If Red Jake found him he would be beaten to within an inch of his life.

Suddenly there was a sound behind him, in the interior of the dungeon—the sound of a dry cough. He caught his breath, and a cold finger of horror moved along his back. Cruach whined and trembled.

A voice—thick, hoarse and unsteady—came from the darkness behind the pillar. “‘O wad some power the giftie gi’e us, tae see oorsel’s as ithers see us!’”

“Who—who’s there?” whispered Dinny, terrified.

“It’s a’ richt. Dinna fash yersel’, laddie.”

There was a shuffle and another cough, and out of the shadows a figure materialised—a stout, elderly man with a stubby beard which seemed to sprout from every part of his broad face. Layers of torn and dirty clothes covered him, and holes in his boots revealed thick brown socks underneath.

Even in the grey light Dinny could see his eyes—small, bloodshot and somehow humorous—glinting beneath the overhanging mop of untidy hair.

Dinny remembered the tinkers who had been in the habit of visiting Drumbeg—a harmless, friendly crowd. This man looked like one, he thought; and the panic that had gripped him began to subside. At any rate it was no ghost.

SANDY DONALDSON

"What is it? What are ye doin' here?" remarked the stranger, peering down; and his slow, deliberate manner put a doubt in Dinny's mind as to whether he was a tinker after all.

But Red Jake, searching outside, was now close to the dungeon entrance. At any moment he might spot it and come down the steps. Impulsively Dinny caught the ragged sleeve of the other's jacket.

"It's my father. He's after me up there. If he finds me he'll take me back to Silver Street."

"An' what's wrang wi' Silver Street?"

"He'll whip me. He took me on a—on a job, the night before last. I—I gave the show away, and he's been after me ever since."

"I see what ye mean." Once again the ragged man cleared his throat, glaring as he did so at the pup. "So ye want me to come to the rescue?"

"Oh, yes. But——"

Dinny stopped abruptly, kneeling down and putting a warning hand over Cruach's mouth. The light filtering down the entrance-shaft had been suddenly obscured.

"He's coming," he breathed. "My father's coming."

The man looked at him in an odd kind of way, pity and cunning mingling in his small rheumy eyes.

"It's a' right," he returned, patting the boy's tousled red hair. "I'll deal wi' him."

He began to shamble up the steps, the beginnings of a tune rumbling in his throat.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Dinny saw his father's legs coming down the steps. Then they stopped, and his voice cut sharply into the silence of the vault.

"Who's that?"

"It's only me," replied the ragged man, hoarsely. "This is wan o' my summer residences. Who might ye be yersel'?"

Red Jake studied the apparition below him. "Never mind that," he retorted, finally. "I'm looking for a small boy. He's somewhere among these ruins."

"Well, he's no' doon here," said the stranger. "I've been lyin' awake since the sun cam' up, an' I didna hear a cheep till ye started tae come down."

Dinny felt Cruach moving beneath his hand, trying to bark in protest. But he held on to her jaws, clamping them shut. He couldn't understand why this dirty, hairy man should be taking his part. It was enough to realise that after all his father hadn't noticed him going down into the dungeon and that in consequence there still remained a chance of escape.

Red Jake's tone became puzzled. "In that case he must be in the main building," he answered, slowly. "I don't think he could have doubled back to the village without me seeing him."

"Had he a dog wi' him, by any chance?"

"Yes—why?" The question was sharp, suspicious.

"Oh, naething. But a meenit ago I heard a dog barkin' in the tunnel."

"Tunnel? What tunnel?"

"I see ye dinna ken much about Bartonhill Castle. There's a tunnel runnin' frae the main entrance up there tae an auld hoose in the village. Veeditors is aye taken back that way. It passes by the dungeon here, an' a meenit ago I heard a bark—on the other side o' the wall. I thocht it was just another stray."

Cruach squirmed even more strongly, and for a moment Dinny imagined she was going to break clear from his hands. But in sheer terror he moved quickly and clamped her into wriggling silence once again.

Red Jake seemed to be upset. "Then he's likely back in the village by this time?" he exclaimed.

"No. If ye hurry ye may catch him. Ye'll find the entrance below the main arch."

"All right. Thanks."

With a feeling of intense relief Dinny saw his father's legs disappearing up the worn stone steps. Then the strange man turned and came back beside him. His beard was split by a sidelong smile.

"Well, we got rid o' him!" he rumbled. "He'll tak' ten meenits tae reach the village through that tunnel, an' by then ye can be miles away in the other direction."

Dinny let Cruach go and patted her. No longer frightened, she whined and licked his hand.

He looked up, unreserved gratitude in his eyes. "I—I—gosh, thanks for helping me!" he blurted out.

"That's a' richt. 'Affliction's sons are brithers in distress' An' Sandy Donaldson's aye keen tae gi'e a

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

helping hand. Ask anybody on Loch Lomondside. The super-tramp they call me."

There was something about his eyes—a glint of cunning behind the humour and good fellowship—which made Dinny uneasy.

"Thanks very much," he said again, smiling dutifully as he got to his feet. "I'd better go now."

"There's plenty o' time." The other patted his shoulder. "Yer faither's gone underground—hear him through the wall there. It'll be ten meenits before he gets tae the village. Meantime—if me and you can come tae an agreement—I'll show ye a grand place tae hide. A place where he'll never find ye in a month o' Sundays."

"That's very kind of you, Mr Donaldson. But—but what's the agreement?"

In the stuffy dungeon there was a silence. A blink of light from the stairs fell on Sandy Donaldson's face, illuminating the scraggy hairs which covered it and showing Dinny more plainly than ever the crafty look in his eyes. For a few seconds he didn't speak, but Dinny's instinct began to warn him of unpleasantness ahead.

"It's the dog," he said at last, his voice quiet and persuasive. "Ye'll never be able to get away from yer faither wi' that dog tae look efter a' the time."

"I'll manage," whispered Dinny, suddenly realising what was coming, but helpless to avert it.

"No, ye'd get on far better by yersel'. An' that's

just the agreement I was goin' tae suggest. Why no' leave the dog wi' me? I'll keep her safe for ye, an' when all this is past an' done wi' ye can come an' get her back."

Donaldson sounded friendly and convincing, and in a way Dinny wanted to believe him. Without Cruach he would be at much less of a disadvantage, and he might be able to travel quicker. But was the tramp to be trusted?

"I'm sorry," he said, as bravely as he could. "I'll just take her with me. It's very kind of you, but——"

The small, bloodshot eyes lost their benevolent expression. The man leaned forward, and for the first time Dinny saw straight cruel lips half-hidden by the beard. He moved away instinctively, but at once a dirty hand shot out and gripped his shoulder.

"I'll ha'e the dog, son. Otherwise I'll keep ye here an' hand ye over tae yer faither."

The predicament which at first he had been unwilling to face was now presented in plain terms. Dinny's whole body became taut with unhappiness and indecision. Hard fingers bit into his shoulder, adding physical to mental pain.

"Please don't make me give Cruach up!" he pleaded, finally. "She—she needs me. She's just a pup."

The hairy face leered closer, and to the boy's fevered imagination it began to look like an evil mask in a nightmare. "A' richt. I'll just gi'e yer faither a shout——"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"No, no! Please, Mr Donaldson——"

"Well, gi'e me the dog. Ye'll get her back."

Dinny knew it was a lie. If he handed Cruach over he'd never see her again. She was pedigreed and valuable. The tramp would probably sell her for as much as he could earn in a month of casual work.

All at once he hated Sandy Donaldson with the fierce, blind hatred of which only a child is capable. He tried to think of a solution to the problem; but his brain was dulled by emotion.

"Come on, son." Donaldson was ingratiating again. "I'll tak' her. Then ye can be off."

He bent down to take the string leash which the boy still held tightly in his hot hand. As he did so a flash of inspiration came to Dinny.

He was on one side of the tramp, Cruach on the other. The leash trailed on the stone floor, touching Donaldson's ankles. If he made a sudden dash for the stairs and the rope grew taut——

He wasted no time on conjecture. Abruptly he twisted away from the other's grip.

"Come on, Cruach!" he exclaimed.

She rushed enthusiastically for the steps at exactly the same moment as he did. The string jerked tight against Donaldson's legs.

The tramp was taken completely by surprise. For a moment he maintained his balance with difficulty. Then as Dinny tugged hard, causing Cruach on the

SANDY DONALDSON

other side to fall and slip back, yelping, he lost his footing and fell heavily on the hard slabs.

The leash slid out from beneath his cracked boots; and next moment, as he lay, winded and feebly cursing, Dinny and Cruach dashed up the steps for the open air.

At the top Dinny paused and looked round quickly. There was no sign of his father anywhere. Presumably Red Jake was still in the tunnel, making for the old house in the village. The way to go, therefore, was in the opposite direction—along a hawthorn hedge and towards a solid square in the morning sunshine.

There were scuffling sounds in the dungeon below as Donaldson got to his feet. His voice came thickly: "Stop there, ye wee devil! I'll break every bone in yer body!"

But Dinny had no intention of stopping. Stumbling over the loose stones which lay everywhere outside the main walls of the ruin, he and Cruach ran as fast as their legs would carry them towards the hedge and reached it just as Donaldson emerged from the dungeon, still muttering crude threats.

Moving along the line of hawthorn, hidden both from the village and the castle, Dinny began to feel more confident. The tramp was too heavy and cumbersome to overtake him, while his father, finding no one in the tunnel, would have no idea where he had gone.

Then a new problem presented itself. What if his

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

father returned to the castle and got the truth from Donaldson? In such a case Red Jake would realise at once that he had escaped in the direction of the bungalows.

The threat made him run even harder. But it was difficult to keep up the pace, especially on an empty stomach. Presently he had to slow down again, much to the disappointment of Cruach, who had been bounding along and thoroughly enjoying the unexpected exercise.

The hedge was brought to an abrupt end by a new wire fence. This enclosed a road running along outside the village of new bungalows. For some time Dinny crouched there with Cruach, recovering his breath and looking back to see if he was being followed. But there was no movement near the castle. It stood bleak and bare on its eminence, between him and the older village.

He had no idea what the time was until he heard a clock-tower, somewhere among the bungalows, chiming eight. From his vantage point among the long grass he watched breakfast smoke rising from the chimneys and people beginning to move about on the pavements.

Then, to his dismay, he spotted a man coming past the castle ruins towards the line of the hedge. Even at a distance he recognised the squat figure of his father.

Panic again surged in his throat. For a second he

SANDY DONALDSON

was tempted to give up the unequal struggle. He was tired and hungry and hopeless. Perhaps his father wouldn't be so hard on him after all. Perhaps this time he'd allow him to keep Cruach.

Then a picture of Drumbeg returned, and his wavering resolution received a fresh impetus.

"Come on, Cruach," he muttered. "We must get going again."

THE CHILDREN'S OUTING

DINNY WAS fairly sure that his father hadn't seen him yet, but as he dodged through the fence and in towards the rows of bungalows he crouched down and kept the hedge between himself and the distant menacing figure.

He crossed the road, jerking an unwilling Cruach in his wake, and entered a street leading downhill to an open square. In the centre of this square stood a clock-tower, and round the base of the tower were gathered four motor-coaches. On an oblong of grass were scores of children, bunched together in a kaleidoscope of summer colours.

The sight of the children, most of them near his own age, struck a warm chord in his heart. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, he began to run in their direction. They offered friendship and protection—and for more than twenty-four hours now he had been without either.

As he reached the outskirts of the crowd he saw that each of the buses had a poster on its side:

BARTONHILL PARK RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION—
CHILDREN'S OUTING TO LOCH LOMOND

THE CHILDREN'S OUTING

Vaguely he realised that he had joined a picnic party setting out for the day.

A small girl in a wide-skirted print frock bent down to pat Cruach. Much to her delight the puppy welcomed her with enthusiasm, wagging her tail and licking furiously.

"What a lovely wee dog! What's his name?"

Dinny forgot his troubles. "It's not a he. It's a her," he replied, with a superior air. "Cruach's her name, and she's a pedigree."

Suitably chastened and impressed, the little girl nodded. "She's awful nice. Pity you can't take her."

"Take her where?"

"On the picnic, silly. Dogs aren't allowed."

Dinny was about to explain that he wasn't going on the picnic at all when a middle-aged man came up to them. He wore a rosette and looked somewhat harassed.

"Hurry on, now! Into the buses! We're late as it is."

He pushed Dinny and the small girl towards the second bus.

"But please——" Dinny began.

The man noticed Cruach. "What's that dog doing here?" he complained, ignoring the boy's protest. "You were all told last night you couldn't bring your pets."

"But I——"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Get rid of it. Leave it tied to a post or something." His expression had become martyr-like, and his voice held the note of despair so often acquired by adults in dealing with children. "Do something quick—and don't blame me if you're left behind."

He hurried off to admonish a nearby group of boys, who were fighting among themselves.

By now Dinny was hemmed in by a chattering, laughing mob of youngsters, all crowding towards the second bus. In the excitement no one seemed to notice his dusty clothes and dishevelled appearance. No one, that is, except the little girl, who was obviously determined to make him her special companion.

"Put her under your jersey," she whispered. "Then no one will see her."

Dinny was in a daze. Peering above the heads of the other children, he looked towards the steep road he had just come down. At the top, silhouetted against a background of green fields, he saw his father. Red Jake stood motionless, staring down.

For the time being Dinny knew that he was hidden by the crowd. Then, looking again at the posters, he realised that if he went with the party he would be fairly sure to reach a point not far from Drumbeg. He protested no longer, but allowed himself to be carried along by events. Lifting Cruach, he concealed her beneath his jersey, and the little girl smiled with mischievous pleasure.

THE CHILDREN'S OUTING

"When we get in, sit beside me!" she commanded. "I've got chocolate."

The crowd pressed behind them. As she stepped into the bus she stumbled, and Dinny had to act quickly to hold her up and prevent her from being hurt. Her smile of gratitude caused him some embarrassment.

"My name's June," she told him as they settled in a seat at the back. "What's yours?"

"Dinny," he replied, automatically. He had glanced out of the rear window and seen his father walking slowly down towards the square. He was so close now that Dinny could make out the film of beard on his broad, pasty face.

Cruach struggled to free herself from the enveloping jersey. Dinny soothed her, his mind a chaos of fear and uncertainty. He was praying that the bus would start soon. If it didn't, Red Jake might look inside and discover him; or someone in authority might spot Cruach and order him off the bus.

June was unaware of her escort's anxieties. She talked to him gaily, pointing out her friends and announcing their names. All down the bus children were opening the windows and leaning out, waving streamers and gaudy balloons. Parents stood in the square, waving back.

Dinny saw his father come to a halt near the clock-tower. Anger and apprehension were equally evident

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

in his expression. Presently he went across and spoke to the man with the rosette.

Dinny's heart stood still. But almost at once the sweating organiser pushed Red Jake aside and continued with his task of filling the buses with children.

A few seconds later, however, Dinny was dismayed to discover that his father was edging closer to the second bus. He bent down as if to re-tie his shoelace. Crushed against his chest, Cruach uttered a muffled bark of protest.

June started to giggle, but Dinny was frightened. Could his father have heard?

He raised himself sufficiently to look out. Red Jake was quite near now, examining the faces of the children at the side-windows. It seemed, however, that he had heard nothing.

"Why don't we start?" he thought, tensely. "Why don't we start?"

He kept his head down, beneath the level of his father's eyes.

"Sit up," said June, brightly. "Sit up and I'll give you some chocolate. I've got three whole bars."

Dinny craved for the chocolate. He had seldom before felt so hungry. But he mustn't sit up. If he did Red Jake would almost certainly see him.

"Just a minute," he muttered, fumbling at his shoelace with one hand and patting Cruach with the other.

Suddenly a new stir of excitement ran through the

THE CHILDREN'S OUTING

bus. The man with the rosette came in and looked round, his face gleaming with perspiration.

"All right in here?" he asked.

Young voices answered in the affirmative, a high-pitched, anticipatory chorus. Dinny wished he could sound as happy and excited as the others.

Cruach squirmed again, begging for freedom. But the sound was camouflaged by the general din, and thankfully Dinny saw the man shut the door and take a seat near the driver.

The leading bus moved off, and the driver of the second revved up his engine.

Again Dinny glanced out. His father had gone away and was now looking into the bus behind them.

Smoothly they began to move. Tyres crunched on a patch of newly metalled road. Children shouted and cheered.

Dinny sat up straight. He released Cruach and ordered her to lie at his feet.

Then he turned to June with a sigh and the hint of a smile.

"I'll have that chocolate now," he said.

A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

IN THE bright sunshine the three picnic buses bowled along the road, past Alexandria and round the leafy bends of Loch Lomondside. From their windows flew streamers and gaudy balloons. When they passed lorries or milk-carts—or even pedestrians—small heads were thrust out and cheers echoed across the smooth, still waters of the loch.

Dinny sat beside June, munching chocolate, while she watched him with admiration and apprehension. She was glad he was enjoying the chocolate, but she had only three bars altogether and hoped he wouldn't want to eat them all.

He was unaware of her anxiety. The chocolate was giving him new life and confidence. Every mile they covered was taking him farther away from Silver Street and his father—and nearer Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter in Drumbeg. Cruach was lying quiet at his feet, and there seemed to be no reason why the man with the rosette should spot her until they reached their destination. As the buses sped past Luss he sat back comfortably and smiled at June.

"Would you—would you like another bar?" she asked, almost below her breath.

A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

"How many have you got?"

"Just one more."

"Oh, well, you'd better keep that for yourself," he said, generously.

She smiled back at him, relieved and happy.

For a time they sat in silence, while the other children shouted and talked and bickered among themselves. Then a tough-looking boy of about thirteen, who had been standing up in the seat in front, caught sight of Dinny and turned to stare at him.

"Who are you?" he said.

Dinny blushed a little. He looked out of the window and made no reply.

June said brightly: "His name's Dinny."

"Dinny?" The young tough stuck out his chin. "Never heard of him."

There was a moment when nothing happened, until the argumentative boy noticed Cruach, sleeping between Dinny's feet.

"Here," he exclaimed, "What are you doing with that dog? There's no pets allowed."

Again Dinny said nothing, remembering from bitter experience among older boys at school that it was always better to keep quiet. June, growing alarmed for her adopted friend, also remained silent.

The boy had a square, sallow face and a shock of black hair. He thrust his head forward.

"All right—you've asked for it. I'll tell Mr Ross."

Miserably Dinny realised that Mr Ross must be

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

the man with the rosette. He had an unhappy vision of the bus stopping and himself and Cruach being ordered out on to the road. But he could do nothing about it. The bully was older and much bigger.

June, however, had other ideas. Like a tigress with a threatened cub she put out a darting hand and caught the boy's hair. He squealed in surprise and pain.

"I hate you, Jim Speir!" she exclaimed, twisting hard. "Promise you won't tell Mr Ross."

The more he tried to pull away the more it hurt. "Leave go!" he panted. "Leave go!"

"I'll leave go when you promise not to tell Mr Ross."

Dinny was distressed. What if Mr Ross heard and looked round to see what was happening? But the bus was long and they were sitting near the back, and the noise was camouflaged in the general din. Mr Ross continued to chat with the driver.

Some of the children in nearby seats noticed Jim Speir's discomfiture and began to encourage June. But she needed no encouragement. She twisted her fingers more firmly in his dark hair and pulled unmercifully.

"Promise!" she hissed at him. "Promise!"

Tears started from his eyes. His forehead bumped against the back of the seat. "I—I promise!" he gasped.

She let him go. He glared at Dinny.

A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

"You'll suffer for this!" he muttered, trying to regain face among his friends. "Both of you."

June was unperturbed. "Just you try anything!" she warned him darkly, and he turned away to vent his spite on an unoffending little boy with spectacles across the gangway.

Dinny glanced at June. "Gosh—you're pretty brave," he said.

She smiled at him. His words were sufficient reward for anything she had done.

They turned right at Tarbet. About a mile farther on, opposite a field which sloped with inviting greenness to the pebbly shore of the loch, the buses drew up.

"Here we are," whispered June, excitedly. "Put Cruach under your jersey again, and everything will be all right."

Dinny did as he was told. Among the other children he pressed towards the door of the bus.

Jim Speir was beside him. Half-way along the gangway the bully kicked. Dinny felt a stab of pain above his left ankle. He gasped. But Jim Speir only laughed sourly and pushed his way ahead. He had gained his revenge.

Dinny was limping when he got out of the bus.

"What happened?" inquired June, anxiously.

"Nothing," he answered, afraid she might create another scene.

He stood among the swarming, laughing children, looking about him. In front was the loch with its

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

tree-clad islands. To the left and right ran the main road, winding through woods and rocks. Behind him were towering hills, dotted with heather and sheep.

But suddenly, as he calmed and fondled Cruach underneath his jersey, he noticed a deep cleft in the hills. And through this cleft, in the distance, there appeared the top of a mountain.

He had never seen it before from this angle, but almost at once he recognised the hammer and up-raised arm of "The Blacksmith". His heart beat faster with excitement. Beyond that distant mountain-top lay Drumbeg. There he would find not only refuge from his father but also the warm comfort of Aunt Mary's arms. For a moment the throbbing pain in his leg was forgotten.

June was watching as he gazed up into the hills, her fair hair riffling in the breeze. The rest of the children, shepherded by Mr Ross, were moving down towards the lochside; but she was more interested in this strangely silent little boy than in the games which would soon be starting.

"What is it?" she asked, quietly.

He pulled himself back to realities. "I've got to go," he said.

"But—go where? The picnic's only beginning."

"I'm not from your village at all," he told her. "I'm running away. Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter live in a farm on the other side of the mountain. I've got to get there as quick as I can."

A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

"You mean—you're going to cross those hills all by yourself?"

"Yes. But I'll have Cruach."

It came to her suddenly that once he left her she would never see him again, and somehow the idea brought her close to tears. She wanted to ask him a hundred questions, but there was no opportunity now. For the first time in her young life she was touched by an inexplicable sadness.

He began to walk away towards a rough track leading up from the main road into the hills. She caught his arm.

"Here, take this," she said, abruptly and breathlessly. Then she turned and ran, back towards the other children.

In his hand, warm and slightly soft in its tinfoil covering, he found her third bar of chocolate.

Mr Ross and his colleagues were too busy organising the day's events to notice the departure of Dinny, and June told nobody about what had happened. Jim Speir was engaged in choosing a suitably large bag for the sack race and had already forgotten the incident in the bus.

It was nearly two hours later, when the whole party was sitting down enjoying lemonade and biscuits, that Mr Ross was approached by a squat, pale-faced man with a hard expression. He had come along the road from the direction of Taret.

"You were too busy to talk to me this morning at

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

the village," said Red Jake. "But after you left I made some inquiries and a chap told me he had seen a boy with a dog going off with your party. I took a service bus and followed on."

Mr Ross scratched his harassed head. "I did notice a boy with a pup," he admitted. "But I told him he couldn't bring it, and as a matter of fact that's the last I saw of him. Why do you ask?" he inquired, suspiciously.

"He's my son," replied Red Jake. "Dinny Smith. He ran away from home yesterday, and me and his mother have been at our wits' end trying to find him."

Mr Ross was a man of abrupt action. He put down his glass of lemonade and loudly addressed the children. "Anyone see a boy with a dog in one of the buses?"

Jim Speir shouted: "I did. With a collie pup. His name was Dinny."

On the outskirts of the crowd June trembled. But she could do nothing now, and in any case her lost boy-friend should by this time be safely over the first ridge of hills.

"Is he still here?" demanded Mr Ross, now convinced that Red Jake was telling the truth and glancing round with fierce authority.

No one spoke.

Then one of the bus-drivers had a brainwave. "Now that I remember," he said, "just after we got here I noticed a small boy with a blue jersey going up

A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

the track yonder." He pointed towards the hills. "I thought he was a local—a shepherd's son maybe. And he did have a dog—a collie pup."

"That any help?" inquired Mr Ross.

Red Jake nodded, smiling. "Thank you very much," he said.

THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS

AS RED JAKE left the party and made quickly for the steep track, Dinny was resting on the heathery slopes of a hog-backed hill, nearly two miles away. Looking back, he could see the picnic crowd like a splash of confetti on the green field far below.

Cruach sat between his knees, looking up at him. She sensed that something was wrong; and, indeed, Dinny was trying hard to keep his mind off the pain in his leg. Jim Speir's shoe had struck him above the left ankle. On his hurried climb along the rock-strewn hillside he had fallen twice, twisting the same ankle each time. Now the place was black and swollen, and the thought of further walking troubled him.

To add to his anxieties the towering "Blacksmith" seemed almost as far away as ever.

Before he reached it he would have to cross a valley, through which a looping burn ran slowly towards the loch. The distance was just about three miles, but to the eyes of a ten-year-old it looked more like twenty.

Besides, great dark clouds had begun to bank up behind the mountain, shutting off the sun from the valley and making its scrubby patches of wood and

THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS

heather look bleak and dark and cold, as if they were the home of evil spirits.

Dinny remembered something else. When he got to the mountain his route would lie across its left shoulder, on account of the impassable cliffs on the right. But beyond the left shoulder a great patch of bog lay between him and Drumbeg. Scores of times Uncle Peter had warned him never to go near that bog. It quaked like a jelly, and more than once he had seen the bleaching bones of sheep lying on its surface.

He shivered. A great loneliness came to him, there in the high hills. Even the glimpse of a shepherd's cottage in the heel of the valley did nothing to comfort him.

Cruach whined and licked his hand. He lifted her and pressed his face against her warm coat. She wagged her tail and gave a small yelp of encouragement.

He put her down. The lump in his throat subsided, and he began to eat June's chocolate. He was hungry, for he had eaten nothing substantial for almost twenty-four hours.

As he finished the bar a small wind sighed up from the valley and he felt a spit of rain. He'd better start moving on. Even though the pain in his ankle made him grit his teeth as he got up, the thought came to him that this nightmare journey would be well worth while if he reached Drumbeg before nightfall.

"Come on, Cruach," he said. And then, to convince

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

himself as much as the puppy, he added: "We'll soon be home."

A small foot-bridge spanned the river some distance below the shepherd's cottage. He moved diagonally downhill in its direction, limping and stumbling among the loose stones and heather.

After a few minutes, as the exercise warmed it, his leg became less painful. But his fear of the valley remained. Each bush and boulder was a menace, and he had to force himself to approach and pass them.

He remembered the pictures in a book Aunt Mary had given him—pictures of a man called Christian trudging across a desolate plain, with evil spirits lurking along his path. In some obscure way the memory was a comfort.

By the time he reached half-way to the bridge the sky had become completely overcast, and the rain was streaming down. It marched slowly through the valley, like a trailing white curtain, and soon he could scarcely make out the shape of "The Blacksmith" in front. His jersey and shorts began to cling to him in sodden discomfort.

For a time he sheltered under an overhang of rock, but inaction soon made him cold and shivery, and his leg began to grow stiff and sore again. He decided that he'd be just as well out in the rain. He couldn't be any wetter, at any rate.

He went on, biting his lip as pain stabbed through his ankle. Cruach whined and conveyed her sympathy

THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS

by remaining close beside him as they walked. The thick hair about her neck and tail was matted and bedraggled.

After what seemed a long time, they reached the foot-bridge and crossed the narrow, tarry planks to the other side. For a minute Dinny stood there, planning his route to the left shoulder of "The Blacksmith".

The rain slackened a little, and the green sides of the valley appeared behind the streaming curtain. Casually he looked back the way he had come. To his dismay he saw a figure moving on the distant skyline -- squat, quick and menacing.

A thrill of fear went through him. Next moment the rain swirled down again and the man was hidden.

"It's my father," he muttered to Cruach. "I'm sure of it. We must hurry."

He tried to run, but his injured leg and the steepness of the slope prevented him making much speed. In a way he was now glad of the rain, because it would keep him from being spotted.

But its protection was soon withdrawn.

As he struggled on, panting and distressed, the clouds above "The Blacksmith" thinned and opened out, and blue sky began to displace the rain-clouds. Presently the sun was shining above him, though the opposite side of the valley, where his father was, still remained shrouded in rain.

He looked about him and found that he had made a

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

mistake in the route and had been climbing too far to the right. The shepherd's cottage was now closer than it had been ten minutes before.

Panic mounted inside him. The rain would soon lift altogether, and if his father caught sight of him now he might easily ford the river farther down and cut him off from the left shoulder of the mountain.

Tears of pain and frustration welled up in his eyes. What was he to do?

He was shivering, and a sudden longing assailed him for human companionship. It was lucky he had Cruach, but what he wanted just then was a friend to talk with.

He glanced towards the cottage, about half-a-mile away. A thin column of smoke rose up from one of the chimneys. There must be someone inside, he thought, someone who might know his Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter and give him something to eat.

On the other hand, it might be someone who would call in the police. The notion daunted him. But his loneliness and physical hunger were stronger than his fears. Tugging at Cruach's leash, he turned in the direction of the cottage.

When he was half-way towards it the rain cleared from the whole valley; but though he kept a careful watch he saw no sign of his father. Perhaps he had gone back downhill. Perhaps the rain had made him give up the chase altogether.

His spirits began to rise. The scent of peat-smoke

THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS

from the cottage seemed to bid him welcome, and there was an air of normality about the small flower-garden which, after his uneasy journey, encouraged him to open the gate and make his way along the gravel path.

Before he reached the front door it was opened. A small, stout woman with piled grey hair stood on the threshold, surprise and curiosity in the lift of her plump hands.

"*Chiall*, it's a wee boy! Where on earth have you come from, *laochain*?"

"I—I'm running away," he answered.

She allowed this news to pass without comment and went on: "You're drenched to the skin, poor wee soul! And your puppy's just as bad. Come away in—come away!"

She led them into the kitchen, a clean bright place with a glowing fire in the range. It was filled with a mingled aroma of peat and baking. Fresh scones and oatcakes were stacked on a long wooden dresser.

"You'll have to get changed at once, dear, or you'll catch your death of cold. And isn't it luck that once upon a time I had a wee boy just like you? He's a big man now, doing his National Service in Germany, but I've still kept a lot of his clothes."

Within a few minutes he had been rubbed down expertly with a rough towel and was putting on dry garments—slightly too big for him—which his new friend had rummaged out from a wardrobe.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Back in the kitchen, drinking a cup of hot tea and eating an enormous sandwich made from a buttered scone and a thick slice of mutton, he felt happier and more comfortable than he had done at any stage of his journey. His ankle, warmed by the fire, grew much less painful. The fact that Cruach had been given a plate of scraps and a bone put the seal on his contentment.

The old lady, it appeared, was a Mrs MacLean. Her husband's name was Rory MacLean, and Dinny vaguely remembered his Uncle Peter having talked about him as a great character and one of the most knowledgeable shepherds in the district.

"He's away in the hill," she told her small guest, "and I'm no' expecting him back till night. I'm just hoping he kept himself dry in that shower. But he has his oilskins, so he ought to be all right."

As he finished his "piece" she went on: "But tell me about yourself, *laochain*. Where are you from, and why are you running away?"

Simply and straightforwardly he told his story.

"Och, I understand who you are now," she said, at last. "Many's the time I heard Rory talk about you. He knows Peter McKerral fine." Sympathy for this little waif made her stout cheeks quiver. "Don't you be worrying any more," she continued. "The postman is due any minute, and I'll ask him to phone them at

THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS

Drumbeg as soon as he gets back to the post office, and before you know where you are Peter will be here to take you home."

It seemed to Dinny that his troubles were finally coming to an end. In another hour or so he would be hearing Uncle Peter's cheery voice at the cottage door. Perhaps Dr Mathieson would be with him. They'd tease him and pull his leg, but he wouldn't mind. And Uncle Peter would lead them through the bog, by the special path, and before it got dark he'd be kissing his Aunt Mary, and there would be no more fear of his father in his heart.

He wanted to tell Mrs MacLean how happy he was—how grateful he felt for her kindness. But he couldn't get the words out. He contented himself with a smile.

She understood and smiled back. "You're awful fond of the McKerrals, aren't you?" she said.

He nodded. "I want to stay with them. I don't want to go back to Silver Street—ever."

"I know, dear. And after what you've told me I don't think you'll need to go back." She shifted a girdle of scones on the range. "Tell me, Dinny," she went on, preparing for a comfortable gossip, "does Jean Mathieson still come about Drumbeg?"

"You mean—Dr Mathieson?"

"Yes. An awful nice lassie. They were telling me that—that maybe she and Peter would be getting married."

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Dinny was startled. "Gosh, I never thought of that," he said.

"Och, maybe it's just blethers. I'm not thinking Jean would give up a fine job in Glasgow to be a farmer's wife. Though Peter's a good lad, and there would be a grand sittin'-doon for her at Drum-beg." Then she chuckled and added: "In any case at your age you 'wouldn't be knowing anything about it."

Dinny was relieved when she changed the subject and went on to question him about his adventures.

Sitting there before the fire he began to feel a trifle sleepy. As time passed he became more interested in the big grandfather clock in the corner than in what Mrs MacLean was saying. It ticked away wheezily, and he was fascinated by the strange-looking people painted on its face.

There was a sound in the garden, as if someone had trodden on a twig. But his hostess, chatting volubly, didn't seem to notice, and Dinny paid it small attention.

Then suddenly he was wide awake and alert, as a knock came to the front door.

Mrs MacLean smiled. "That'll be the postman," she said.

He watched her going to answer the door, wiping floury hands on her apron. She disappeared into the dark passage.

He heard the door open and her exclamation of

THE COTTAGE IN THE HILLS

surprise. Then the voice—the smooth, hard voice that always made him feel helpless and afraid.

“Good day,” said Red Jake. “I think you’ve got my son here. I was up on the hill and saw you take him in.”

Dinny didn’t wait to hear Mrs MacLean’s reply. His heart pounding in his throat, he took Cruach in his arms and stumbled blindly for the small window at the back of the kitchen.

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

WITH CRUACH panting against his side, Dinny scrambled through the small kitchen window. He found himself in a patch of vegetable-garden and stumbled across the rows of beetroot and cabbage heedless of the damage he was causing.

As he climbed a wire fence on to the open moorland, he was vaguely conscious that Drumbeg was still some miles away and that his route—unless he made a long detour—lay across the quaking, forbidden bog to the left of “The Blacksmith”. But at the moment, listening to the raised voices of Mrs MacLean and his father at the cottage door, he was oblivious to the danger of the journey. Even his bruised and swollen ankle was forgotten. His main idea was to get away—to put as much ground as he could between himself and his father.

And while he raced into a narrow glen whose hazel and bracken would, for a time, conceal him from view at the cottage, Mrs MacLean was attempting to deal with Red Jake.

“I saw him come in here,” the man was saying. His pale face oozed drops of sweat, and his eyes were murderous. “Let me in, or it’ll be the worse for you!”

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

Mrs MacLean stood her ground at the door. Into her mind came a confused memory of a recent newspaper story—a lonely cottage on a moor and an elderly woman struck down by a villainous tramp. She was cold and afraid, and with all her being wished that her husband Rory would suddenly come back to save her. But despite her fear she made no move to let the stranger in.

She answered firmly. "I tell you there's no boy here. And even if there was," she added, as a sop to her Presbyterian conscience, "I wouldn't be giving him up to a man like you. You're no' fit to be any child's father."

His eyes dilated. His hands rose slowly from his sides, and she saw the spatulate fingers begin to curl.

She felt numb and helpless. Surely it couldn't be true. Surely a thing like this wasn't happening to her.

But she was still determined to do all in her power to save the little boy. The thought of him—tired, wet, hungry, trusting himself to her—brought a sudden access of strength and courage.

In the stand in the porch was a shepherd's crook with an intricately carved horn handle. She snatched it up and raised it to strike. But an old woman's attack was no threat to a man like Red Jake. With a snarl he ducked under the flailing stick and caught her by the throat. She tried to scream, and the stick fell from her suddenly nerveless fingers.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

"Get out of my way!" he growled and flung her to one side.

Her right elbow struck the edge of the stand with sickening force. She had no idea that Dinny had already made his escape and was now struggling through the bracken-filled glen behind the cottage, and in the midst of her pain and fright she still thought of his safety.

"Run, Dinny—run!" she gasped, as Red Jake entered the kitchen.

Suddenly, to her intense relief, she glimpsed the postman coming across the little bridge.

"Jamie!" she screamed. "Jamie—come quick!"

Red Jake thought it was a ruse to distract his attention from the inside of the cottage. Nevertheless, he returned at once from the empty kitchen. His face was paler than ever, and his tongue slid over dry lips.

He caught her by the injured arm. "Where's that boy?" he demanded, twisting it.

Then he spotted the postman running up towards them and realised that her call for help had been genuine. At the same moment he glanced far to the right and saw Dinny and Cruach emerging from the top of the small glen, hurrying across the left shoulder of "The Blacksmith". He pushed Mrs MacLean from him and began to run in a heavy, lumbering fashion. His obvious intention was to cut Dinny off before he could reach the distant ridge which overlooked Drumbeg.

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

Jamie the post was a wiry man whose left arm had been disabled at Alamein. He was friendly and trustworthy but not overblessed with intelligence. He saw Red Jake making off up the green hillside and could, with an effort, have intercepted him. But instead he maintained his course for the cottage, where Mrs MacLean stood trembling just outside the porch.

"What is it?" he demanded, as he came through the open gate. "Who was yon man?"

"Oh, Jamie!" she cried, catching his sound arm. "Wait till I tell you."

When she had finished he fumbled in his bag, presented her with a meagre mail and ran back down the path. "All right, Mrs MacLean, I'll get tae the office as fast as I can and send a message tae Peter McKerrall. An' if I meet Rory on the hill I'll send him tae ye."

"Thank you, Jamie," she whispered and went into the cottage, wiping her eyes on her apron and hoping that the pain in her right elbow would soon get better.

She looked out of the kitchen window. Far in the distance she thought she saw a small running figure against the skyline. But she couldn't be sure, for the rain was coming down again.

It would be about an hour later when Peter, coming in from working at a fence, saw Jean's car approaching from the direction of the village. Its speed was so urgent that he knew something had happened, and he

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

raced towards the farmyard. When he reached it, Jean had already got out of the car and was talking to his aunt.

He heard her quick, excited voice. "Oh, Mary—I went down to the village to get the morning papers and just as I came out of the shop Jamie the post called to me. He knows where Dinny is." Peter's boots rattled on the cobbles, and she turned to him. "Peter—Dinny's trying to reach us here. Across the shoulder of the hill yonder. He was at Mrs MacLean's, but his father came and he had to run for it. Jamie says Red Jake attacked Mrs MacLean and then went after Dinny."

She stopped, breathless. Her eyes, wide and apprehensive, stared up into his face. She saw the lines deepening about his mouth and a pulse throbbing in the lean angle of his jaw.

"Poor wee Dinny," whispered Mary. "It's the marsh I'm thinking about."

For a moment Peter looked down at Jean. He knew that she was trusting him to do what was best. Her lips were trembling, and it came to him suddenly—and with a small shock of surprise—that in spite of her imposing position as a doctor, she might not after all be as self-reliant and independent as she seemed.

He put an arm about her shoulders. "Aunt Mary," he said abruptly, "Jean and I will go up there across the hill and try to intercept Dinny before he reaches

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

the bog. Will you go down to the village and phone the police at Arrochar?"

"Of course, Peter."

"Tell them exactly what's happened and ask them to send somebody up to 'The Blacksmith' at once in case we have trouble with Red Jake."

"I—I'll go now. The dinner's all ready, but I expect it'll have to wait."

Quick action was foreign to her placid nature, but she rose to the emergency. Tying a scarf about her grey head she hurried off down the hill. Only once did she look back, but in that moment she saw Jean and Peter beginning to climb the long slope which led to the shoulder of "The Blacksmith".

When she put through the call at the post office it was a sergeant who answered. He seemed to know all the details of Dinny's case.

"Thank you very much, Miss McKerral," he said. "I'll send two men to 'The Blacksmith' right away."

"You—you won't put Dinny under arrest?"

"Don't worry. It's Red Jake we want. The Glasgow police searched his house and discovered the canvas shoes with the string laces that the night-watchman talked about. He's for it, Miss McKerral. And now that he's hurt Mrs MacLean there'll be another charge against him."

As she left the phone box Mary knew that if Dinny escaped from his father and the quaking marshland

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

his future was assured. Lawyers would prove that Red Jake had forced him to assist in the attack on the night-watchman; and as the son of a convicted criminal the courts would decide that he stood in need of "care and protection". He would be allowed to remain as Peter's ward at Drumbeg, where his heart had always been, and she would make sure that the mental wounds he had suffered would soon be healed.

But would Jean and Peter be in time to save him? As she toiled up the long brae, Mary McKerral closed her eyes and said a prayer to herself.

High up on the shoulder of "The Blacksmith" Dinny and Cruach were running for their lives, with Red Jake two hundred yards behind and slowly gaining.

Had Dinny's ankle been sound, it is possible he could have out-distanced his father, who was stout and in bad condition. But every step he took was agony now, and he had to force himself to go on.

Down at the head of the strath, and beyond the bright green bog, lay the white steading of Drumbeg. The rain had stopped, giving place to a windless afternoon, and he could see Aunt Mary's dinner smoke rising straight into the pale grey sky.

His heart was filled with fear—and with longing to reach that distant goal. It looked so near. And yet

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

if his father overtook him now he'd never see it again.

Red Jake's laboured breathing and the rasp of his shoes on the heather-covered rocks were clearly audible. But Dinny dared not look round. He ran with a limping determination which taxed all his strength.

It was lonely up here. Nothing seemed to exist except himself and Cruach and Red Jake—and an occasional curlew which flew up from the soggy rushes with a melancholy cry. He found himself sobbing, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon this little child". But he remained alone, it seemed, with nobody to help him.

He went on, holding Cruach's leash so tightly that it bit into his hand. He eased his grip and let the string lie loose in his fingers.

"Stop, you little fool!" Harshly, breathlessly, Red Jake's voice came to him again. But he pretended not to hear.

And then at last he was on the verge of the bog. He saw the spreading black bubbles and the emerald green islands of turf. He knew there was a safe path somewhere, but he had no time to look for it.

He ran straight on, leaping out on to the first of the islands. The turf moved and slid, but its surface held.

At the last moment, impelled by an instinct of

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

danger, Cruach had stopped abruptly, and as Dinny jumped her leash had slipped from his hand. Now he turned to call to her.

But already Red Jake had caught up. He kicked the puppy viciously, and she jumped into the bog, whining and crying. Dinny stumbled back and lifted her from the sucking slime. As he gathered her to him, he noticed with dismay that one of her forepaws was hanging limp.

Red Jake hesitated on the brink. "Come back!" he shouted. "Come back!"

But Dinny, more terrified than ever, turned away and scrambled out on to the next trembling tussock of grass.

Red Jake realised that if he followed in Dinny's wake he would be safe enough. His mind was dulled by exertion, and at first his only thought was to catch his son and prevent him giving evidence against him. But as he jumped out on to the shivering morass another idea presented itself. If he drove Dinny on, sooner or later he must stumble into the slime and be sucked under. Then he himself would be free from all anxiety.

Hatred for his son, stirred up by physical and mental strain, had turned Red Jake for a time at least into a madman. Flecks of foam appeared at the corners of his mouth, and he shouted incessant threats.

Those shouts came floating through the still air to Jean and Peter, who by this time were climbing over

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

the slippery screes above the bog. For a moment they stopped. Looking down, they saw Dinny and his father plunging across the sinister green wilderness.

"He'll never make it!" exclaimed Peter. "The path's fifty yards to the right—in this direction."

"Is it—is that place really dangerous?"

He nodded. "It's dangerous all right."

Jean caught the hard timbre in his voice and sensed his determination on a plan of action.

"Peter—what are you going to do?"

"I think I can get across there and lead him back to the path."

"But you may slip into the bog yourself. And then there's Red Jake——"

He caught her hand. "Don't worry, Jean. I can deal with Red Jake—and with the bog, too, if I'm lucky."

In that moment of shock and fear she discovered at last that her happiness was completely dependent on this man who had always been her friend.

He looked down and saw with amazement the expression in her eyes. It was like a miracle.

Then suddenly, with new confidence and courage in his heart, he left her and began to run towards the bog.

He found the line of stepping-stones which led out as far as the path. He raced across them, his heavy farm boots sending up splashes of slime at each jump.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Finally he reached the path and paused to regain his breath.

Fifty yards away, Dinny caught sight of him. His heart bounded with an eager, frantic hope.

"Uncle Peter!" he shouted. "Uncle Peter!"

But almost at once he remembered that his father was close behind. He turned at right-angles and started to run desperately for the path. To begin with he kept his footing, and Peter, working his way towards him, had a transient hope that everything might still be all right.

Then he saw Dinny slip and fall and the slime oozing up about his bare legs. He heard him scream.

"Don't be afraid!" he called out. "I'm coming!"

Back at the place where Dinny had turned, Red Jake stood stock still. Abruptly the madness left him. He saw his son sinking in the bog, and cold sweat began to bead his forehead. Had he hounded Dinny to his death? Would the police now accuse him of murder?

Panic choked him. He found it impossible to move. He realised that all round him was this horrible quaking marsh and that another step might bring him, too, into deadly danger. He sank to his knees, whimpering.

Meanwhile Peter was closing in on Dinny.

"Don't struggle!" he shouted. "Keep quite still."

But Dinny, with the cold mud oozing around his knees and Cruach under his arm an additional anxiety,

FLIGHT THROUGH THE MARSH

did not understand. He struggled violently, and as he struggled he sank deeper and deeper still.

"Uncle Peter! Uncle Peter! Help me!" he pleaded.

Peter jumped on to a tussock two yards away. He flung himself down and reached out. The ground shivered and moved beneath him, but he scarcely noticed. He caught Dinny beneath the armpits and pulled—fiercely, determinedly.

At first he was afraid that his task was going to be impossible, for the awkward angle at which he lay gave him insufficient purchase. Then he found that with safety he could edge forward a few inches. He did so, carefully testing as he went. After a moment his arms were about the little boy again, and he was whispering: "All right now, old chap! All right now!"

He flexed his muscles. And at last with a sudden back-straining effort, he lifted Dinny and Cruach clear from the bog, leaving behind a gurgling mass of yeasty bubbles.

He rose to his feet with them both in his arms and looked about him. Jean had followed him across the stepping-stones and was waiting on the path, the palms of her hands pressed tightly against either cheek. High on the screes behind her two uniformed policemen were hurrying down towards the marsh.

And then he heard Red Jake's terrified voice.

"Save me, too, Mr McKerral! I tried to help the kid, but he wouldn't listen, and now I'm stuck here!"

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

Peter gave no sign that he had heard, however, and began to thread his way back in the direction of the path. Dinny's father was in no real danger. The police would reach him soon and take him to jail.

BACK TO DRUMBEG

AUNT MARY bathed him and put lotion and bandages on his cuts and bruises and brought him down to a belated meal with Jean and Peter. Only then did Dinny fully understand that after his many adventures he was safe at last.

Ever since his return to the farm, cold and shivering with exhaustion, he had said very little, except to point out that Cruach's foreleg had been hurt by Red Jake's kick. Now, however, after a plate of hot broth, and with the prospect before him of roast beef and mashed turnip, he began to show traces of youthful resilience.

He glanced up at Peter at the head of the table. "How's Cruach?" he asked.

"Fine. I put a bandage on her paw and gave her a dish of porridge and now she's sleeping the sleep of the just in the kitchen."

He sighed with satisfaction. "Poor Cruach," he remarked. "She had a bad time."

Jean smiled. "Hadn't you a bad time, too?"

"Well, in a sort of a way," he admitted.

Then he fell silent again and addressed himself to the roast beef.

DINNY SMITH COMES HOME

But later, when the milking was over and they were sitting round the fire listening to another storm of rain outside, he told them what had happened.

Aunt Mary put her arm about him as he sat on the stool at her feet, knowing that in retrospect he was feeling the strain and terror of his escape.

When he had finished she said: "So you met some nice people after all?"

"Oh, I did. Awful nice people. The baker I had breakfast with, and the old lady who gave me the money, and Dave Morton the boxer, and the wee girl on the bus, and Mrs MacLean. And—and Jock the policeman. He was nice, too."

"I'm glad of that," said Mary.

Jean nodded. "Those are the people you should remember, Dinny. They're actually far more common in this world than the other kind."

Peter smiled to himself. The cure and readjustment of Dinny's mind had already begun, and he was content that the outcome should be left to Jean and his aunt. At the same time, he considered that he himself had an important role to fulfil. He must make certain—as he had already explained to Jean—that in the process Dinny didn't become too spoilt and pampered.

"If it's a good day on Monday we'll be taking in the hay," he put in, with a man-to-man inflection.

Dinny's eyes lit up. "Gosh, that'll be great, Uncle Peter. Will I get to lead old Bess?"

"Of course."

BACK TO DRUMBEG

Dinny chuckled with pleasure. Then all of a sudden he added: "Uncle Peter, can I get another sweetie?"

Mary butted in. "But you've had four already since dinner-time. Enough's as good as a feast, you know."

"Och, let him have another," said her nephew, persuasively. "After all, think of what he's been through."

Mary sighed and took the paper off a caramel.

Jean laughed. "Wonderful!" she remarked. "Our strong, silent man who was going to make sure that Dinny isn't spoilt!"

"Oh, well, I—I'm sorry," he answered. "You know how it is. He's not really settled down yet."

Dinny put the caramel in his cheek and said: "Oh, I nearly forgot, Aunt Mary. Mrs MacLean said that Dr Mathieson and Uncle Peter are getting married. Is that true?"

An odd silence settled on the room, causing him some concern. Then Mary looked across at the two young people, her eyes kind and understanding.

"Well—is it true?" she asked.

Jean sat back on the arm of Peter's chair and put her arm about his shoulders. She looked young and excited and carefree.

Peter grinned. "There's no smoke without fire," he said.

Dinny wondered exactly what he meant. But he sensed that everybody was happy. And at last he was happy, too.